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1899-1902

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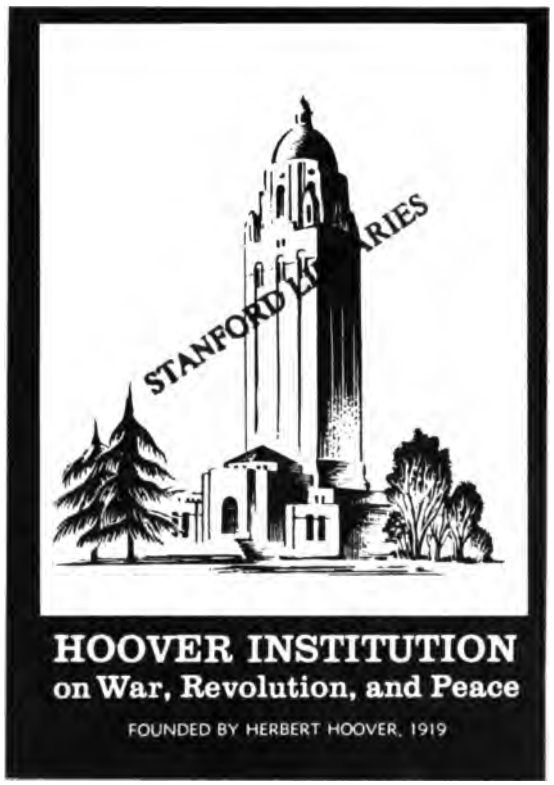
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THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF IN THE FIELD: LORD ROBERTS WRITING DESPATCHES IN HIS WAGGON TENT AT PAARDEBERG.

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CASSELL'S
HISTORY OF THE BOER WAR

1899—1902

REVISED AND ENLARGED EDITION

ILLUSTRATED

VOL. I

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CASSELL'S ILLUSTRATED HISTORY

OF

THE BOER WAR.

CHAPTER I.

THE FIRST FIGHT—TALANA HILL.

IT was a bright October morning. The sun rose over the hill and veldt of a rocky mountainous country in the northern corner of Natal, shedding its rays upon a scene at once awful and inspiring. For there eight thousand men were gathered to strike the first blows of that contest which should decide whether or not the British race should rule in Africa from the Cape of Good Hope to the Zambesi's bank.

SIR WILLIAM PENN SYMONS.

This was not the first time that men in arms had met in conflict in those regions. Full many a time had the hardy white settlers who first colonised the country been obliged to assert their dominion at the muzzle of a rifle. But these were unequal conflicts. The Zulus, the original black population, were not the equals of the white men either in arms or in policy; and their savage bravery, supported only by the assegai, had failed before the disciplined valour, the steady conduct, and the gunpowder of the Europeans. But on this day the combatants were more equally matched, and the issue was far more serious than in those days when black aboriginal and white settler met.

Imagine a hill, rocky and precipitous—a hill such as one sees in the Western Highlands of Scotland—with boulders scattered about it as though some giants of old had been playing at "chuckie-stane." Unlike our British hills, however, this hill is not green nearly to the top. It is brown—of a peculiar loam-coloured brown such as the British home-staying person never sees in nature. In a week or so it will be clad with verdure, for soon the summer begins, and with it the rains. But now it is brown, bare and wild. Such was Talana Hill on the morning of Friday, October the 20th, in the year of our Lord 1899.

At the foot of the hill were gathered a brigade of British soldiers, of a quality, perhaps, such as our Army has never seen. Not raw ploughboys, straight from the ploughtail, such as Wellington commanded that day when he stopped the way to Brussels, and, with a sunken road as his only entrenchment, defied for fourteen hours the finest troops in the world and the best artillery, led by the greatest commander since Oliver Cromwell. No! These were not raw lads. They were men who had been "salted" for a tropical clime in Egypt, in India, and in South Africa itself. The Dublins had been in Natal for two years. And they were all burning to wipe out the memory of the disaster at Majuba Hill in 1881. They had heard that the Boers had boasted plentifully of how the red-coated *rooinek* was a poor sort of fellow, who could not shoot, and was a good and easy mark; and they desired to show these hunters and farmers how foolish and unfounded was this contempt.

But where was the thin red line? Where was that red coat of the British soldier which has seen every climate and latitude? The Boers searched for it in vain. For the British War Office had, since the day of Majuba, abandoned the policy of making the British soldier the best living target in the world, and had even been brought to believe that a soldier under the scorching suns of India and Africa may march and fight a little better if he be not clad in a garb originally built for London in December. Wherefore the 4,000 men at the foot of the hill were arrayed in a kind of fine canvas, called "khâki," a stuff devised for our troops in India and thus named because of its colour. In the Hindustani tongue, or some dialects thereof, *khâki* signifies "mud." Lord Roberts was responsible for its general use in India.

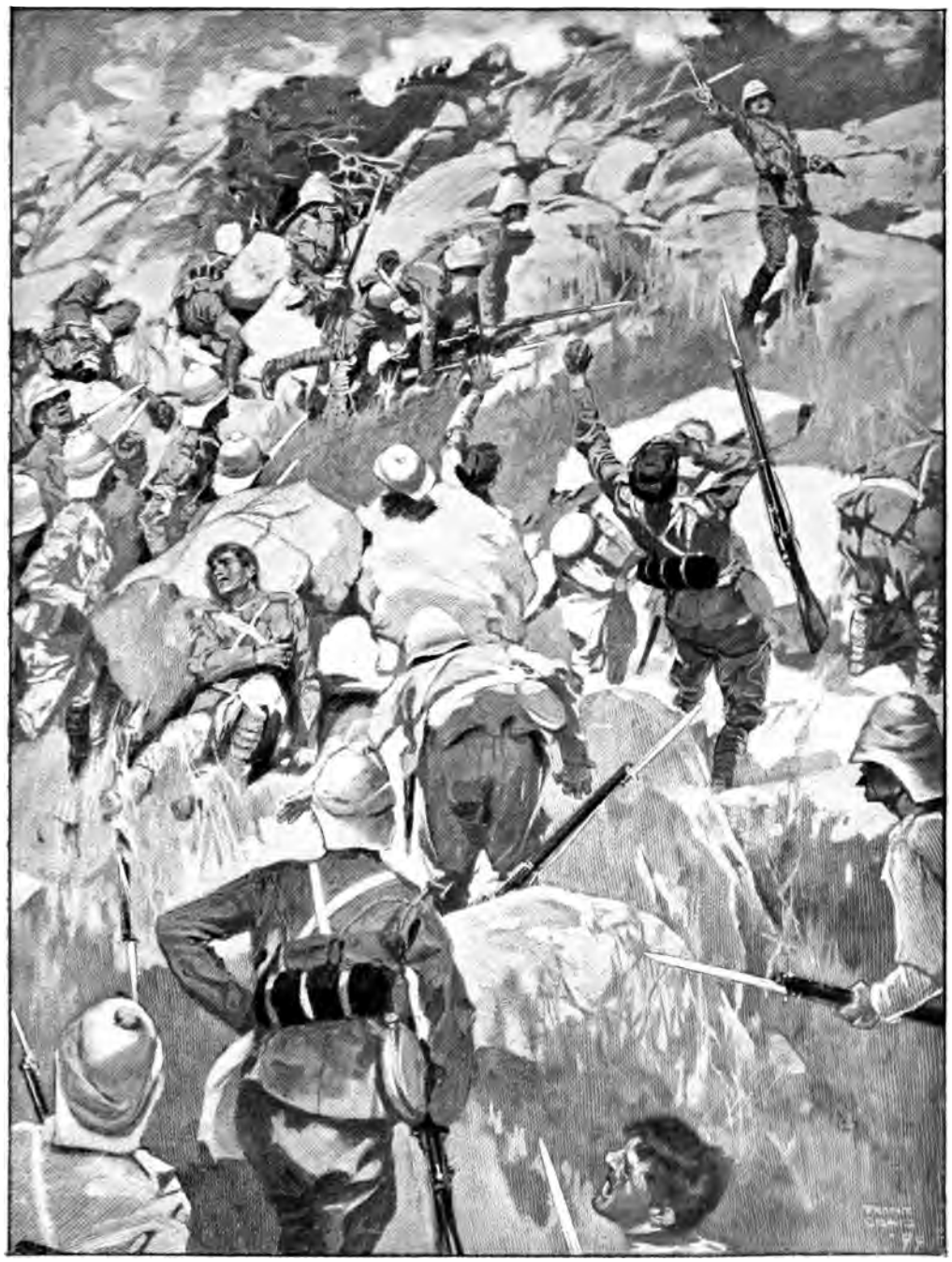
These 4,000 men, or thereabouts, now assembled at the foot of Talana Hill, comprised a splendid infantry brigade of four battalions,* a squadron † of mounted infantry, some cavalry, and some irregular Natalian troops mounted. The footmen were—the 1st Battalion of the Leicester Regiment (the 17th), the 1st Battalion of the King's Royal Rifles (the old 60th), the 1st Battalion of the Royal Irish Fusiliers (the 87th), and the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers (the 102nd). The only cavalry—and even at this stage the want of mounted men was to make itself felt—was the 18th Hussars, under Colonel Möller, in addition to the Natalian volunteers and mounted infantry before mentioned. There were, likewise, three Field Batteries‡ of Artillery —the 13th, 67th, and 69th.

At the top of the hill, another 4,000 were gathered. Brown-faced men these, young and old; farmers, most of them, and farmers' sons, from beyond the Buffalo River. And mixed with them were a few foreigners—Irish and Russian, French and Scandinavian, with here and there a German with stolid face. Soldiers of

* Most regiments of British infantry are divided into battalions—two or more of regulars, one or more of militia, and one or more of volunteers, each consisting, when at full strength, of 1,010 men of all ranks.

† "Squadron" is, perhaps, an improper term to use of mounted infantry. A squadron is a fourth part of a regiment of cavalry on peace footing.

‡ A Battery is a unit of artillery. Our artillery is not divided into regiments as cavalry and infantry are, but into batteries. A Field Battery consists of six guns, worked by five commissioned officers (major, captain, and three lieutenants), and 176 non-commissioned officers and men of various grades, nine being artificers (collar-makers, etc.) and fifty-nine drivers. The guns used are 15-pounders, sighted to 5,000 yards.



THE STORMING OF FALANA HILL.

fortune these: fighting, some for love of the Boers, some for love of money, some for hatred of the English. But the farmers and the farmers' sons fought from necessity, and because Paul Kruger had said that if they did not fight hard and shoot straight the Dutch republics would vanish in the capacious maw of the British Empire.

The composition of the force was twofold — artillery and mounted riflemen. There were no infantry, in the proper sense of the term. Each man carried a gun, but no sword or bayonet. Nor would swords and bayonets have been of much use to them; for they had not tried these weapons. Their rifles they knew and trusted, and could use them as only hunters born and bred can—with confidence born of usage, and aim steady and true, bred of a clear eye and muscles of iron. Bearded men, most of these, with rough, shaggy heads of hair. Uniform they had none, being dressed in the ordinary every-day dress of a colonial farmer, with hats of all sorts, from a tall and ancient beaver to a slouch felt.

Each man carried a bandolier of cartridges. They had proceeded to the field of battle mounted on hardy, shaggy ponies, of nondescript breed—animals of great endurance, able to live on next to nothing: fast, surefooted, docile. But as the armies faced each other that morning the ponies were in groups in the rear, being loosely tethered and guarded by boys and old men, about one attendant to ten animals. These ponies were, of course, of no use as chargers; but as a means of locomotion, of rendering their riders a mobile force, they were invaluable.

Of guns there were on the crest of the hill of Talana six field-pieces. On the 19th (Thursday) the Dutchmen had thrown up entrenchments—ditches in which the riflemen could lie and take shelter, walls of loose stones; besides cover for the guns.

And so the sun rose on 8,000 men, stern and resolute, armed with weapons of destruction such as no two white nations had ever used against each other before, and each resolved to play the man.

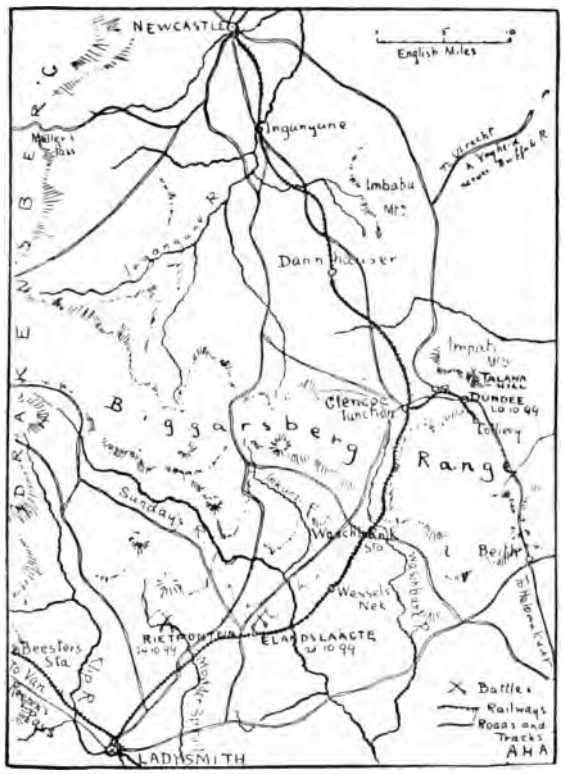
Commandant Lucas Meyer, a well-known Transvaal patriot, president of the First Volksraad, held command on the top of the hill. General Symons led the 4,000 men in mud-coloured garments at the foot. It is easy to see that Meyer had the best of the position. He, to begin with, held the top of the mountain; he was in an entrenched position; and he was on the defensive.

Scarcely had the sun risen when a gun boomed out, and a shell sailed through the air and dropped near the British camp at Dundee. But either the range was too long—it was about 3,400 yards—or the marksmanship was bad, for the first shell fell far short of its mark; but the third or fourth shot found its range. It was not very deadly, however, for the shells were of the "plugged" variety—*i.e.* not intended or expected to explode, but rather to act like the old-fashioned solid cannon-ball. The first shot was fired at about 5.30; and it caused surprise almost amounting to consternation amongst the British. Let us go back a few hours and see why that should be.

General Symons had been sitting with his advanced camp at Dundee for over a week—ever since the war broke out. His scouts and pickets had, indeed, since the 18th of the month, been coming in contact with small detached parties of Boers; but these were not in anything like sufficient numbers to attack the advanced column, and were regarded as scouting and sniping parties. Even thus early in

the war, however, we were to feel the difficulty of dealing with an enemy so mobile as this. It was here to-day and gone to-morrow. To-day your scouts, having scoured the country for miles round, bring word that there is not an enemy to be seen within thirty miles of you. And probably your scouts are right.

Yet the very next morning, when your camp wakes with the reveille, you find within a few thousand yards of you a whole army, with guns already mounted and rifle-pits dug. That is exactly what had happened in this case. On Thursday our scouts had scouted some twelve or fifteen miles to the bank of the Buffalo River, which formed the boundary between the Transvaal and Natal, and had seen nothing. They reported, quite correctly, "No enemy to be found this side of the Buffalo." And let it be remembered that General Symons had the services of a number of the Natal Mounted Police and Carbineers, men who knew the country by heart, to do scouting work. Yet on Thursday night, Lucas Meyer, gathering together his 4,000 Vryheid farmers, forded the Buffalo River, dragging with him his six field-pieces; and, marching with all the stealthy rapidity of a moss-trooping band of Scottish border raiders, this force swept straight on Dundee.



SKETCH MAP OF NORTH-WEST NATAL.

They might have surprised Symons had not his pickets been particularly alive; but at 2.30 in the morning of Friday a mounted infantry picket of the Dubliners saw something challenged it: a shot was fired: a private wounded: and the picket was driven in. It was known, therefore, that Boers were near the camp; and immediately on the picket's report, the General sent a party of the Dublin Fusiliers to take possession of a dry river-bed (there called a donga) on the east of the town. This donga was at the foot of Talana Hill, about 1,700 to 1,900 yards from the top, and formed a valuable starting point for the footmen in the battle. It afforded cover from rifle fire, and here troops could be formed for the attack.

At first it was thought in the British camp that the burgher force was only a

party of riflemen ; but the boom of that first cannon quickly undeceived our men. And General Symons found himself confronted, not by a mere reconnoitring or raiding detachment, but by a force equal in number to his own and armed with long-range field artillery. How those guns were carried to the top of the hill, over rocky ground, in dead of night, and silently, was, and remains, a mystery.

For some little time the Dutchmen had all the artillery firing to themselves ; but soon our batteries joined in. The 67th, which remained in the camp along with the Leicester regiment as a reserve, opened the ball on our side. The enemy used some smokeless explosive, probably melinite, and the positions of their guns had to be found by watching the flash as each cannon was fired. This is one of the difficulties of modern warfare. In former times the smoke of the powder soon told where the enemy's pieces were ; but science has abolished this guide.

Meantime the other two batteries rattled off. The 13th went forward to the right, and the 69th forward to the left. General Symons formed his plan of battle pretty quickly. He was determined to give the Boers a lesson : to show them that the *rooinek* whom they despised was a good soldier and brave man, and that, to put it in the words of an officer, "Majuba Hill was not a fair sample." So he ordered the battle thus :—The batteries were to shell the burghers' artillery and put it out of action—a thing that ought to be fairly easy with twelve guns against six, with greater skill and with better ammunition.

When their batteries were silenced, ours were to shell the enemy's infantry position and try to demoralise them ; or, at all events, to give them something to divert their attention from our infantry. These last were to be formed in the river-bed, and then to climb the hill in loose or open order—that is, with plenty of space between the men—so as not to afford too good a target for the marksmen on the hill. They were to take all the cover they could get, and, creeping and rushing alternately, go from cover to cover until the charge was sounded. Then it was to be "Up and at 'em" with the bayonet. Meantime the Hussars were to make a detour round the hill, ready to cut up the retreating foe.

Symons must have had supreme confidence in his infantry to attempt a thing of this kind. To begin with, he was sending 2,000 men to attack nearly double their number, for only the battalions of the King's Royal Rifles and the Dublin and Royal Irish Fusiliers could be spared. The Leicesters must be kept in reserve for contingencies of the fighting, as well as to hold in check any flank attack.

So the men formed up in companies and battalions behind the village of Dundee, eager, expectant, ready ; and by half-past five they marched out, the Dublins leading, by half-companies. That first startling shell had dropped just after the "before daylight parade," and the men had had no breakfast. And thus it came to pass that British soldiers went into battle hungry.

I know it is a common superstition that the same British soldier can neither fight nor march unless he has plenty of beef—a superstition encouraged by the author of "Waverley," who makes Charles the Bold speak of "the beef-consuming knaves." If you want to know how the "knaves" can fight on empty stomachs, make the acquaintance of some Boer who was at Talana. If you want to know how they

can march, read hereafter the story of the retreat to Ladysmith.

At 5.45 (a.m.) o'clock our batteries had galloped into position, and they and the Boer artillery thundered at each other for nearly two hours. The plugged shells of the burghers did little or no damage; while our men, after they had got the range—and that was in less than twenty minutes—dropped shell after shell into the Boer position with merciless rapidity and precision. Our gunners were using shrapnel, which, when it bursts, sends out a shower of bullets; and as the shells were bursting well, there must have been blood running round the Boer guns. Still, the Dutch gunners, with the stubbornness of their breed, stuck to their work, and for two hours sent down with beautiful accuracy their ineffective missiles amongst our men. As shell after shell dropped about our guns, every time without exploding, our Mr. Atkins began to be merry, and more than one of them was heard to express the opinion that these were made in Germany, and that the manufacturer had sold not only the ammunition, but "Mr. Kroojer" as well. For when soldiers go into battle they do not talk heroic sentiments. They chaff one another and the enemy, and talk about everything except their heroic determination to do or die.

By 7.30 superior armament and ammunition had told their tale, and the artillery on the top of the hill ceased from troubling. One by one the pieces ceased to speak. Whether they were disabled or not, no man can tell to this day; but for the purpose of the moment, it was sufficient that they were silenced. And the men of the 69th and 13th Batteries cheered as they moved their guns forward, and began to shell the riflemen who lined Talana's crest.

From 6 o'clock the three infantry battalions had been lying down in the donga, and their position was trying enough. The rain was beginning to fall in a soaking drizzle, and it continued to fall all day. But the men were cheerful enough, for all that.

By 9 o'clock, the men having then been lying down for three hours or more—the original company of Dublins for double that time—the word was passed, "Unbuckle greatcoats from your waistbelts, and place them on the ground."

It is needless to say that since the battle began the men in the donga had not remained entirely unmolested. They had received a shell or two, and some rifle fire; but the damage done was trifling. Now the work was likely to be hotter, and the men braced themselves to do what had never been attempted before—namely, to carry by a frontal attack an entrenched position held by riflemen armed with the best modern weapons of precision.

It may be remarked that in theory this is impossible—all the best military authorities said so and had been saying so for a dozen years or more. Valour and the bayonet were to be at a discount. Every entrenched position must be turned, and these theories never applied more than on this day, when the men entrenched were the finest shots in the world. But these brave lads, the dashing Dublins, the gallant old 60th Rifles—who had loosed musket and rifle for 150 years, the world over, to the discomfiture of their country's foes—the fiery Irish Fusiliers, set out to perform the impossible. Well they knew the cost, but they held life cheap as the price of victory.

To be exact, the work to be accomplished was to march up the hill, first of

all up to Peter Smith's Farm, a quiet homestead about half-way up, and surrounded by a not very thick wood. This

HUSSAR SCOUT
(Photo: Knight, Aldershot.)

part of the advance was very easy climbing, but it had the disadvantage of affording no cover until the men should reach a wall running partly up and partly round the hill. The next cover was the wood. From the wood they had to proceed steeply over bouldery, rough ground to a sort of terrace, which formed a kind of break in the hill. Round this terrace ran a second wall, a thick stone one. From beyond this wall the ground was just about as rough as ground could be, and from the end of the terrace to the top of the hill there was an almost perpendicular climb. There is no need

to enlarge on the difficulties which such a position presented to an attacking force. It was a perfect Gibraltar.

Quietly and in order, the Dublins leading, the infantry advanced across the first gentle slope, making for the shelter of the first wall. The whole of this slope was open, and well within rifle range, so the order went that the advance was to be by half-companies. So the first half-company,* spreading itself out wide as for skirmishing, marched boldly across nearly half a mile of grass veldt, affording them no protection at all. And now blazed out the rifles from the plateau of Talana Hill. From some cause or other the farmers' shooting was not so deadly as it might have been. The Mausers emptied their magazines time and time and again, but of the leading company not a man fell. The infantry shook themselves together.

"Are these the beggars who call themselves marksmen?"

"Oi shud be ashamed av miself av Oi cuddn't hit a whole man at this distance!"

"'Tis a wickud waste av good ammynition, Oi cahl ut!"

"We shall have to send the serrgeant-major to tache thim muskittrry!" Now the sergeant-major's shooting is always the joke of the regiment.

"Sure, bhoys! They think 'tis the band we are, bekase we're marrchin' forrst, an' they don't mane to horrt us."

So the first half-company reached the shelter of the wall; and, lying down behind it, began to fire at the enemy—rather, at the top of the hill; for not a Boer showed himself. At the same time the second half of the same company marched over from the donga; and, as they arrived, they joined in the firing. At last, all were under the shelter of the wall; and then began a move to the wood, and in this stage of the attack a few men were hit.

At length the wood was reached. Welcome shelter! And here the men halted for the word to advance. Their next objective was the second wall above mentioned. It was now about 9.30, and here a terrible blow fell upon the British. General Symons had been galloping about the field, exposing his person with a fine disregard of danger. Bullets fell round him like hail, and his staff suffered heavily. The general was a mark the more conspicuous because he was attended by a mounted orderly who carried a lance bearing a red pennon, this being intended to serve as a landmark for all who came with messages for the general. Unfortunately, it also served to draw the attention of the Boer sharpshooters.

At about 9.30, then, Symons galloped across the open ground to the wood where the men had taken cover to speak a word of encouragement, and to give his final orders for the attack. It seemed as if every rifle on the plateau were aimed at him, and it was matter for marvel that he and his horse were not riddled. But neither was touched. While in the wood, being within fairly easy rifle range, he became the object of further marked attentions from the marksmen. His officers besought him to take cover, to retire, to dismiss the flag-carrying orderly. In vain! It was another case of Nelson and the stars and medals on his coat. "Do you think I'm going to let them imagine that I am atraid?" A bearded Boer looks over the entrenchment. His rifle goes to his

* A battalion of infantry is divided into companies. A company is composed, when at war strength, of 101 privates, five sergeants, five corporals, two drummers, two lieutenants, and a captain; the last-mentioned is the company commander.

shoulder. A careful sight, a long aim, a touch of the trigger, a sharp crack like the crack of a whip, and ere the Boer has emptied out the spent cartridge from his rifle General Symons reels in his saddle mortally wounded. A bullet had struck him in the stomach.

Carried into the village, his one thought is of the field he has left. "Are they—at —the top—yet?" And the doctor soothes him and brings a proud smile to his face by telling him, "Nearly at the top." And then the man of healing science injects morphia, for the pain of the wound is agonising.

The charge of the operations now devolved upon Yule, the colonel of the Devonshire Regiment, who held the local rank of Brigadier-General.

As for the men, nothing could now hold them back; for Symons was a man much beloved. Forward they crept, taking advantage of every boulder and every rock, for the range was shorter now; and any man who was seen was instantly made the target of a hundred rifles. Here the casualties grew more numerous. All the regiments advanced practically together, and in half an hour (at about 10.5) had won as far as the second stone wall. Under cover of this the Rifles and Irish Fusiliers halted for two hours.

The distance from the plateau was, perhaps, 600 yards—rather less if anything—and any man who showed himself dropped at once, lucky if he had only one bullet in him. The artillery on the right and left front were working round for a good position, and continued to shell the entrenchments. Rarely has there been more accurate artillery fire. For two long hours the battle held thus, the Boers showering Mauser bullets on our infantry; our artillery showering shrapnel on the Boer riflemen.

It is not to be imagined that our Lee-Metfords did not speak at all. It was not likely that a crack shooting corps like the 60th would lie within 600 yards of the enemy and not burn a cartridge or two. Now there was a Boer, a wily man, and a sharpshooter. A sharpshooter is one who can shoot with the utmost accuracy without appearing to take aim. Up goes the rifle to the shoulder, and almost simultaneously the trigger is pulled. This particular Boer sharpshooter made himself an unmitigated nuisance to a company of the Rifles. Did one show out of cover so much as an inch, the Boer hit him. The captain of the company put his helmet on a rifle and raised it a little above the wall. Two bullets were through it before he could lower it. "Good job a head wasn't in it."

Now in this company of the 60th there was another sharpshooter. And the rest wanted to know, with many expletives, what was the good of him. And they became so vigorous in their remarks that the object thereof was constrained to ask them, "Wot there was to bloomin' well shoot at?"

At last, however, the British sharpshooter found a place whence he could watch the stone behind which his rival was ensconced; and he waited. Now! The least little bit of the Dutchman's head is visible above his boulder. Crack! The Lee-Metford speaks. Cruel fate! Just as Tommy pulls the trigger, another Boer, impelled by curiosity, puts his face above the stone, right in front of the sharpshooter. He drops! And as he drops, derisive laughter shakes the sides of the 60th.

It was no laughing matter for "the other old beggar," who lay with a bullet through his brain; but it furnished matter

"GENERAL SYMONS REELS IN HIS SADDLE MORTALLY WOUNDED" (p. 9).

of merriment for a good hour to that company of the Rifles. To all except one.

The Fusiliers, on the left of the attack, had a curious method of progression. This is how they mounted. There was, running up from the wood nearly to the top of the hill, a gully, or cleft in the ground, with precipitous, grey boulder-strewn banks. The Irishmen crawled along, a few at a time, and dropped into this gully, where they could be seen by, but could not see, the enemy. They made their way along it, dodging from boulder to boulder, until they reached the other end. Then, singly, every man making himself as small as he could, they crept out. Every man, as he emerged, crawled for cover to the left; and as soon as a whole section was out and under cover, another started. Of course, those who were out fired as often as they could see anything to fire at.

In this way the line of infantry crept slowly up the hill; and now the men began to drop. "Who's that?" "F Company! Man down." A bullet is through his head. A man crawls ahead to take cover. A groan! "He's hit!" And an officer springs out to bear him to a place of safety. Plucky of you, Captain Weldon. But fatal. For a score of rifles direct their fire at the gallant officer, and he drops, more sorely stricken than the man he went to help.

At noon, for the space of a few minutes, the Dutchmen slackened slightly, and in a minute the word was "Forward!" The "advance" sounded, and in a trice Rifles and Fusiliers were over the wall, bolting across the terrace and scaling the almost perpendicular height at the top of the hill. Here there was no cover, and men fell fast. The King's Royal Rifles were, if anything, leading, headed by Colonel Gunning, as fine an officer as ever wore a sword. He was at the head of his regiment, and nearly at the top of the hill, when he was shot through the brain.

The Rifles went in with a wild yell and a rush that nothing could stop. On top of them came the Dublins and the Royal Irish; and at last the climb was over, the impossible had been accomplished, and those three battalions of British infantry stood victorious on the crest of that blood-stained hill. There was some hot work with the bayonet for those Boers who still remained in the trenches. But few waited the onset. When they found the despised *rooinek* so close at hand, looking so fierce and determined, and carrying that terrible steel, the Dutchmen, true to those tactics of guerilla warfare which they use so well, ran for all they were worth, mounted the little razor-backed ponies, and were off like the wind. A few, wounded and unwounded, surrendered.

For the infantry, the battle was now over. They had been victorious. They had carried an almost inaccessible position in the face of such rifle fire as the rest of the world could nowhere show. They had proved themselves the true sons of that invincible infantry which drove Napoleon's marshals from the Guadalquivir to the Pyrenees. They had shown that valour may still win battles, that in military matters the personal equation is still something.

But at what cost was the victory won! Symons was down; and it was certain that he would never more lead his old comrades. The King's Royal Rifles had lost, in addition to their colonel, four other officers in killed and seven wounded—in all, twelve officers out of the seventeen who went into action. The Dublins and the Royal Irish Fusiliers had also suffered, but less heavily. They had lost respectively two officers

killed and three and five wounded. Of non-commissioned officers and men, the Rifles lost eleven killed and seventy-five wounded, the Dublins four and forty-four, and the Royal Irish Fusiliers fourteen and thirty-one. The proportion of casualties amongst officers was, it will be seen, enormous, and it arose from this fact : in carrying a position by this kind of attack, it is imperative that the men should take cover ; and it is the duty of officers commanding companies to select the cover. Now, when bullets are falling like hail it might be that it would be better for officers wishing to survey the ground ahead of them to raise themselves no more than is necessary, so as not to expose themselves. But this has not been the way of the British officer. For good or evil he would never take the least care of himself. If you asked him why, he would tell you : "Must set good example to the men, y' know. Never do to let 'em think we funked." Or perhaps he would tell you, with a stare of surprise, that his business was, in the main, not to take care of himself. And so on the slope of Talana the officers exposed themselves with the cool and careless recklessness of their race and their class, walking when they might have crawled and when crawling would have been quite dangerous enough. In the front the whole time ; the whole time as conspicuous as they could well be made by the glitter of their uniform and the carrying of sword instead of rifle. How a single man of them escaped is nothing less than a miracle, for every one of them was, for several hours, a target—a special target —for some of the finest marksmen in the world.

Among others fell Colonel Sherston—"Lucky John," they called him—one of the fine fellows who had helped to earn Lord Roberts his famous title of Baron of Candahar. He was serving on the brigade staff here, and by his death the Empire lost a brilliant servant. Colonel Beckett, Major Hammersley, and Captain Lock Adams, staff officers all, were seriously wounded. The King's mourned Colonel Gunning, Captain Mark Pechell—a stalwart man who towered head and shoulders above his fellows, and who led his company up the slope until he was picked off—and Lieutenants Taylor, Barnett and Hambro.

Connor, the adjutant of the Irish Fusiliers, received a mortal wound, and Lieutenant Hill was shot dead. This was not the first time Connor had been under fire ; the North-West Frontier of India well knew his fearless form. Best of Irishmen, most dashing of soldiers. His men wept when he breathed his last. The Dublins lost Captain Weldon, who was shot dead instantaneously, and Lieutenant Genge, mortally wounded. And, greatest loss and grief of all, the general, too, proved to be mortally wounded, though he lingered on for several days.

So much for the losses ; now for the gains of the victory. To begin with, the Boers undoubtedly suffered heavily from our shell fire. It was known that they had buried or carried away most of their dead and wounded ; but about thirty were lying on the plateau, and there was captured a field hospital with seventy more wounded.

As a matter of fact, the whole force ought to have been destroyed, but that they were not was due to two stupid blunders. The 69th Battery was well placed for shelling the retreating enemy, the guns having been dragged forward to Smith's Nek (*Nek* = pass between two hills), whence the defeated commando could be distinctly seen retreating, with guns and all equipment.

By all the rules of the art of war, the 69th Battery ought to have plumped shell after shell into this retreating mass of men, galloping after them when they got out of range, and have smashed, pulverised, and destroyed them utterly, and compelled them to abandon their artillery. This chance was, however, thrown away. Why? Nobody knows. The explanation given was that someone had informed the officer commanding the battery that an armistice had been concluded!

Now there is another way of driving defeat home—of turning a defeat into a disaster, a disaster into a rout—and that is by the use of cavalry. As stated before, General Symons had despatched Colonel Möller with 200 or so of Hussars and mounted infantry round the hill, to fall on the enemy's flank. Night fell, and nothing had been seen of Colonel Möller. Firing was heard, late in the day, in the direction of the enemy's line of retreat; and our men hoped and thought that Möller and his men were cutting up the enemy. But Meyer, though defeated, was not routed. When Möller's force put in an appearance on his flank, the wily Dutchman ran away until he had lured the Hussars into a trap, out of which it was impossible to get in the face of 2,500 men with rifles.

When the unfortunate Hussars found themselves entrapped they seized a Kaffir cattle station, and defended themselves bravely enough as long as they could. Then they surrendered.

And that is how the defeated army of Lucas Meyer was able to send 170 British prisoners to Pretoria—the whole cavalry of the force that defeated them. No! Not quite the whole. For a certain Sergeant Baldrey, who was with a troop of thirty separated from the rest, cut his way out, and by the exercise of skill and discretion, as well as bravery, contrived to steer his troop safe back to camp with the loss of three horses only.

It was a great feat, and Baldrey proved once more that there are men who do not hold commissions but who are quite able to lead. Finding that his colonel had blundered into two fresh commandoes of General Joubert's force, Baldrey ordered his men, who were away on the left scouting, to face about. Off they went, but not unperceived. The Boers thought that Baldrey's contingent would ride straight back to Dundee. Not a bit of it. The sergeant was a tactician. So while a Boer party went to cut him off, he headed for the open country. Another Boer party pursued him for half a day, and fired on him; but not a man was hit. It was not until several days afterward that the little band rode into camp. They were obliged to make a great detour to avoid the cutting-off party between themselves and Dundee. And they had to scout every yard of the way, for fear of blundering into a party of the enemy.

Of Boer ponies, Mauser rifles, ammunition, and so forth, there was a good deal left behind in the retreat; and the King's Rifles captured two Transvaal flags— a bit of honour and glory that gallant regiment well deserved.

The material gains of the victory of Talana Hill were not very marked, but the moral gain was enormous. It indeed showed the Boers that "Majuba was not a fair sample"; and it taught our men that even these vaunted marksmen could be overcome, and that, too, when they had the advantage in numbers and the best position. Still, the patriotic Briton could not but lament that the material gain had been so slight.

BLOEMFONTEIN, CAPITAL OF THE ORANGE FREE STATE.
(Photo: W. H. Pocock & Co., Cape Town.)

CHAPTER II.

THE CAUSES OF THE WAR.

IT is impossible to understand the cause of this quarrel without going a long way back—back, in fact, to the beginning of the century. After the Great Prisoner had been immured in St. Helena's lonely isle, Great Britain was allowed by the Powers to retain possession of Cape Colony, with other Dutch territory, upon paying to Holland £6,000,000. Cape Town, and the district round it, had been colonised originally by the Dutch East India Company, and many farmers had emigrated thither. Thither also went large numbers of French Protestants, two centuries ago, when their own fair land was made an impossible abode for men who dared to believe according to their conscience. But after the Cape became a British possession, a few English and Scots went there too, and became farmers and traders.

The farms were largely worked by the labour of slaves, the original black inhabitants of the country. In 1833 slavery was abolished wherever the British flag floated, and Parliament voted an enormous sum of money by way of compensation to slave-owners. It was alleged, and it may be true, that the Boers of Cape Colony did not receive their fair share of compensation. At all events, in a few years' time they found themselves with ruin staring them in the face. And so in 1833, and right on to 1837, a large number, many hundreds, packed up their household chattels in waggons, drove their flocks and herds before them, shouldered their muskets, and trekked forth into the wilderness.

They settled to the north of the Orange River, and some even crossed the Vaal

River, a stream which runs westward and southward, and eventually pours its intermittent waters into the Orange River. They subdued the country, fought and defeated the Zulus, Basutos, Bechuanas, and other native tribes; and there they lived for nearly twenty years, farming and hunting. As for government, they thought little of it. Each isolated householder kept order in his own domain. The British Government laid claim to their allegiance, but it was given grudgingly, or not at all, until at last, by the agreement of 1852, known as the Sand River Convention, the "Dutch African Republic," or Transvaal, was recognised as independent. British emigrants had been pouring in on the North-East, and had largely colonised the country now known as Natal, of which possession was formally taken by Great Britain in 1843.

The Sand River Convention carved out as independent Boer territory an enormous tract of country north of the Vaal and south of the Limpopo or Crocodile River, extending east to Delagoa Bay, and west from the Marico River to Fourteen Streams, a country of 110,000 square miles, or 20,000 square miles greater than Great Britain. In 1854 the British Government further conferred independence on those Boers who had trekked north of the Orange, but south of the Vaal, under the style of the Orange Free State. The Free Staters, from that day to the year 1899, lived at peace, and apparently in amity, with the subjects of the Queen, who formed their southern, eastern, and western neighbours; and, their country being a fertile one and well enough watered, they speedily became a solid, sober nation of pastoral and agricultural farmers. Their national history, happily, was uneventful.

But with the Dutch African Republic—afterwards called "The South African Republic"—matters were very different. These men seemed to comprise the whole of the more fanatical part of the trekkers—stern Calvinists: more like the Westland Whigs whom Claverhouse hated than like any other men of whom we know. They were the Chosen People. The blacks were the race of Ham—the Hivites and the Hittites, who must either be exterminated or made to labour for the superior race. They passed the *Grond Wet*, or Fundamental Law, declaring that they would "admit of no equality of persons of colour with the white inhabitants either in Church or State." This spirit brought about troubles with the natives; and there were massacres; and vengeances; and more massacres. They even quarrelled with and invaded the Orange Free State in 1857, and tried to impose a union upon the Free Staters. In 1868 Delagoa Bay was annexed—on paper—by Pretorius, the President; but on Britain and Portugal putting in rival claims, the matter was referred to arbitration, and Marshal MacMahon awarded the Bay and the territory a few miles inland to Portugal, which was a blessing in disguise to the Transvaal, as she has discovered in this war.

In 1875 the burghers entered upon a war with Sikokuni, a native chief, and had by no means the best of it. Then Great Britain tried to prevail upon the two Boer States to agree to a federation of themselves, Natal, and Cape Colony; and this might have been accomplished but for the action of the Cape Ministry of the day. The reason assigned for this was the danger from the natives, who were everywhere restive. The Zulus were, in fact, having very much the best of a war that was raging between the Boers and themselves. Then, in 1877 Britain inter-

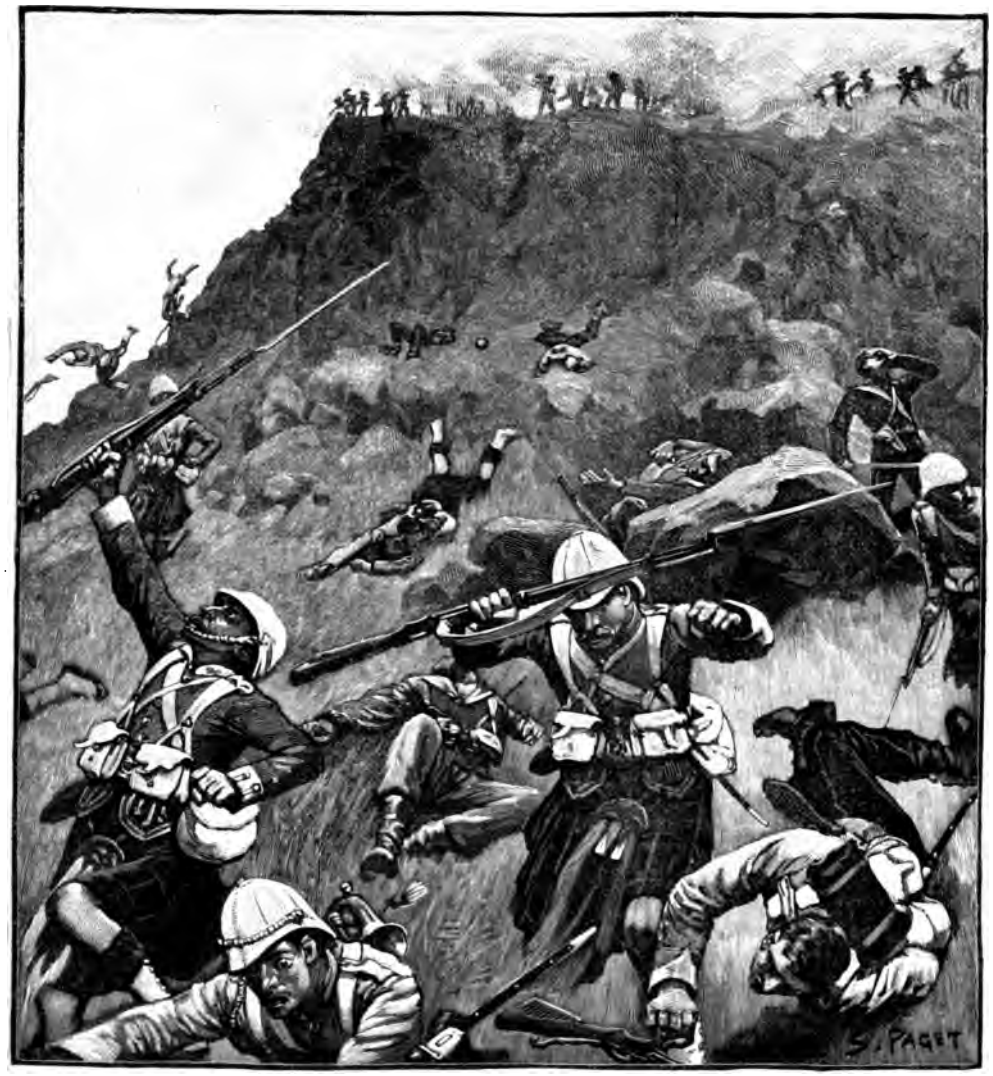
vened and annexed the Transvaal, it being alleged that the burghers as a whole were agreeable to this course. As a matter of fact, many objected, including one Paul Kruger, who headed a deputation of protest to England.

they formed a secret combination. And at last, just before Christmas of 1880, a large party of farmers met to celebrate the defeat of Dingaan by Pretorius,* rose in open revolt to resist the seizure of a farmer's waggon, which had been distrained

A BOER FATHER AND SON READY FOR THE FRONT.

After the Zulu War, in 1879, in which many Boers fought with us against the natives, some taxation was imposed on the Transvaal to help to meet the expenses. Now the Boers, under their own government, had hardly known the meaning of taxation, and they prepared to resist. They accumulated in every farmhouse stores of ammunition. They bought the best rifles ;

* Dingaan was a Zulu chief, who almost exterminated the Transvaalers. After defeating them several times and overrunning the country, he was met near the Buffalo River in 1840 by the last force possible for the Boers to collect, and defeated with such slaughter that his power was broken. The Boer general, Pretorius, was ever afterwards regarded as the saviour of his country ; and the capital of the young republic was named after him—Pretoria. The anniversary of Dingaan's Day is the great Transvaal festival of the year.



THE ROUT AT MAJUBA HILL.

upon for taxes. Over a thousand burghers there assembled took an oath not to lay down their arms until independence had been achieved. As each man's turn came, he picked up a stone, and, when he had finished taking the oath, he cast it from him, until gradually a cairn was made. This was at Paardekraal.

The burghers acted with great promptitude, and, to cut a long story short, eventually met and defeated a small force of British soldiers, under Sir George Colley, at Majuba Hill, near the place where Natal, the Free State, and the Transvaal meet. The shooting of the Boers was so deadly that almost every man who showed himsel

was shot. Sir Evelyn Wood was ordered to quell the rising, and Lord Roberts was also despatched from India. But nothing further was done. The British Government had previously made up its mind to grant independence to the enemy, and a Convention was signed for that purpose on March 21st, 1881.

As the preamble of this Convention gave rise to much dispute, it will be well to summarise it. It declared that the British Government accorded "complete self-government, *subject to the suzerainty* of Her Majesty, her Heirs and Successors." In 1884 a further agitation was begun in the Transvaal for a revision of the 1881 Convention, and in 1884 the British Government consented to a revision. The Convention of London (1884), as it was called, declared that "the following articles of a new Convention should be substituted for those of" the 1881 Convention. It is somewhat important to notice this, because, since the Convention of London did not mention suzerainty, it was contended that suzerainty had been tacitly abolished or purposely dropped.

The words last quoted hardly seem to bear that construction on the face of them; but it is impossible for any person to speak with real impartiality on the subject, and it probably will be so for many years to come, because the matter has been made one of party politics. And where party politics begin, farewell to impartial judgment. The Macaulay of 1950 will, perhaps, be able to solve the problem. It is certain, however, that "suzerainty" was an unfortunate word to use. "Suzerain" is a feudal term, adopted by us from the French; and it describes this state of things: Suppose, for example, the King of France granted a province to a nobleman, as he did to the first Duke of Normandy. The nobleman, being a vassal of the king, was bound to render him the services contracted for when the grant was made—generally, services in war. The great vassal let out the land in smaller parcels to counts and knights, who became bound to serve him, and these to farmers and husbandmen, who became bound to serve them. Now, the King of France was the suzerain or over-lord of that province. But his powers regarding it were of the slightest—as witness the relations of the Dukes of Normandy and Burgundy with their suzerains, the French kings. Technically, the great vassal owned the suzerain assistance in time of war and certain irregular occasional payments in money or in kind; and he was bound not to make war upon his over-lord.

This state of things, which is really suzerainty, could not possibly be supposed to describe the relations intended to be established between Britain and the South African Republic. And, therefore, the term was one of those loose, misleading words, sure at some time to lead to dispute; because its plain, grammatical, legal meaning not being the true interpretation, each side tried to put on it a gloss to suit its own purposes.

This also seems certain: that the Boer view of "suzerainty" was not the British view. The Convention of 1884 contained two other provisions which led to dispute. One was Article 7, which guaranteed to British subjects and loyalists resident in the Transvaal on August 8th, 1881, full civil rights and protection for their persons and property. Article, 14 guaranteed to all persons (other than natives) full liberty to enter, reside, or travel, possess landed property of all kinds, carry on trade and commerce in the republic, without being subject to any taxes, general or local, other than those imposed upon burghers.

Not very long after the Convention of London the Transvaalers showed some disposition to extend their boundaries; and, largely to prevent trouble with the natives, who have always hated the Transvaal Dutch, but partly, also, to protect them from oppression, the British Government hoisted the Union Jack in Bechuanaland and proclaimed a protectorate there. This was in March, 1885, and it had the effect of confining the new republic to the Limpopo as its western as well as its northern boundary, and of preventing any possible expansion of territory.

The subsequent seizure and colonisation of the country of the Matabele by the Chartered Company of South Africa also shut them in to the north, and left the two Boer republics absolutely surrounded by British territory, except for a strip of the eastern frontier of the Transvaal, marching with Portuguese East Africa (Delagoa Bay).

Here they might have remained peaceful enough, attending to their flocks and herds, their sowing and reaping, had it not been for one fact, which altered the whole aspect of South Africa, and created again a South African question.

In 1886 gold was discovered in the Middleburg district of the Transvaal. More was found in the Witwatersrand. And immediately the little township of Johannesburg, about twenty-five miles away from Pretoria, began to receive the inrush of the hordes who came to hunt for the precious metal. Soon Johannesburg became the largest and most prosperous town in South Africa, and the population was a population of all nations, but chiefly British subjects.

It was the discovery of the gold that made war possible; for it produced the Outlander question, and it led to the Jameson Raid. Finally, it made the Transvaal rich, and thus enabled the burghers to accumulate warlike stores, to construct fortifications, to hire officers from Europe, to employ mercenaries, to convert Pretoria into one of the most formidable arsenals in the world, and to make the South African Republic the best-armed State in Africa. In 1885 the revenue was £177,876. In 1898 it was £3,983,560, and of this £321,651 was from mining prospectors' licences, £668,951 from railway receipts — principally connected with the Rand—and £1,066,994 from Customs, due to the large increase of population on the Rand.

In course of time the Outlanders, as the new population was called, outnumbered the Boer farmers, who regarded the immigrants from the first with mistrust and dislike. For although, as a mining city, Johannesburg was never a centre of lawlessness, vice and debauchery such as were found in the early Californian and Australian goldfields — since the Rand mining was conducted by machinery, and was necessarily an organised industry—yet the pious Calvinistic farmers regarded with horror a town where night was turned into day, where the Sabbath was not strictly observed, and where theatres and music-halls existed. Imagine, if you can, what would have been thought of such a place by the Scottish Whig farmers of Wigton and Dumfries in 1600, or even in 1800, and you may have some idea of the Boer feeling.

Ere long the Rand population began to agitate. They found themselves governed, policed, judged by a set of men whom they regarded as ignorant bigots; lazy, unprogressive. They found themselves paying nearly all the taxes, and having no voice

DR. JAMESON AND HIS STAFF (*p.* 22).

in the spending of them. The Volksraad, or republican parliament, was elected by Boers only. Taxation was adjusted, so they said, in order that they, the men who were "making the country" by their capital and their brains, might be practically the only taxpayers. Their children were obliged to be taught in a hybrid Dutch *patois*, or else not go to school at all. Dynamite, an essential in Rand mining, was only obtainable from a concessionnaire, who had bought the monopoly of it from the Government. They were taxed far more heavily than the needs of government required. They had not even the municipal franchise. They complained that there was no justice—in the inferior courts, at all events—between Boer and stranger. They even complained of the corruption of the Government. This was the Outlander question. The time has not yet come when a historian can decide on the rights of this quarrel. Here it is merely intended to state both sides as fairly as may be.

The Boers replied:—We will not give you the franchise in any way on an equality with ourselves, because you outnumber us, and to do this would be national suicide. In President Kruger's words, "How can strangers govern my State?" As to taxation, you come here to get rich; you take your riches literally out of our soil. It is only fair that you should pay more heavily than others. Lastly, we know that you Englanders wish to make this a British State. We will not submit to lose our independence.

After a time, the British Outlanders appealed to their parent Government to interfere; and some remonstrance was addressed to President Kruger. While pourparlers were being exchanged, an association called the Reform Committee appealed to Mr. Cecil Rhodes, the controlling head of the Chartered Company, a man of vast wealth and influence only surpassed by his ambition, to aid them. And eventually it was agreed that a rising should take place in Johannesburg; and that, if need be, a force of the Chartered Company's men should march from Rhodesia through Bechuanaland and assist the Johannesburgers by policing the town and protecting the women and children.

Dr. Jameson was then administrator of Rhodesia; and he, in December, 1895, got together about 600 men, all mounted, with some Maxim guns, and marched from Mafeking over the Transvaal border. But the movement failed for want of concert. The Johannesburgers, who had been obliged to arm secretly, were not yet ready to rise when, on Monday, the 30th of December, 1895, they heard that "Dr. Jim" and his men were at Krugersdorp, a point about twenty miles west of the golden city. The Boer Executive had been better informed—in time, in fact, to gather together a force of burghers who blocked the way to the Rand. The republican force met the raiders after these had been marching for ninety hours almost continuously.

Men and horses were tired out when, on the 1st of January a rifle-fire from the adjacent hills and kopjes brought them to a halt. Cover was sought; but the burghers had selected their position. And although the Englanders fought bravely enough for a time, they finally surrendered. The commandant of the Boer commando at first decided to shoot the prisoners, but eventually thought better of it, and the ringleaders were ultimately handed over to the British Government, were tried in London, convicted of an offence against the Foreign Enlistments Act, and sentenced to varied terms of imprisonment.

The Johannesburgers at once surrendered such arms as they had, on the advice of the British Commissioner at the Cape. And from that time to the outbreak of war, negotiations went on from time to time between the Governments for a removal of the Outlanders' grievances. But the Boers' suspicions were aroused. "You want," they said, "not equal rights, but our country"; and from that time they regarded Mr. Rhodes as a kind of Mephistopheles. And when in the House of Commons Mr. Chamberlain publicly exonerated Mr. Rhodes from blame, "as a man of honour," the Colonial Secretary was regarded as hand-in-glove with their worst enemy. And so, when negotiations reached any stage beyond mere politenesses President Kruger distrusted Mr. Chamberlain and the British Government. He adopted a procrastinating policy. And very soon the British Government distrusted him, too.

Meanwhile the Transvaal Government was arming. Every sixpence it could raise was spent upon munitions of war of the latest and best type. Mauser rifles, Maxim guns, Hotchkiss guns, field artillery and guns of position from the Creusot works in France, shells and cartridges in millions. And as the Boers were no cannoneers, having, for the most part, a pious horror of great machines, German gunners were imported. And French, Russian, and German officers came in and surveyed the country, and prepared to place their knowledge of the art of war at the service of the Boers.

The Free Staters also armed, and concluded a treaty with their cousins mutually to defend the independence of the two republics. Negotiations for the friendly settlement of a dispute are not likely to be successful when neither party trusts the other. And in this case neither party did. Sir Alfred Milner had been sent out to the Cape as High Commissioner after the Raid, to see if he could not restore harmony between the white races there; and ultimately, in 1899, when the Colonial Office persisted in its demands for redress of Outlander grievances, but without inducing the Transvaal to do anything, Sir Alfred Milner suggested a conference between himself and President Kruger. This was held on the neutral ground of Bloemfontein, the capital of the Orange Free State. But again each party thought the other had something "at the back of his mind," as the Americans say, and the conference ended in precisely nothing. This was in May and June of 1899.

War was now in sight. The negotiations still went on; and once or twice it appeared possible that a settlement would be arrived at by peaceful means. But the old distrust prevented the realisation of this hope. The letters between the parties became more bitter and more recriminatory, each not failing to accuse the other of bad faith. The British Government accused the Transvaal Executive of breaking Article 14 of the 1884 Convention (see p. 19) by unfair incidence of taxation, and by rendering life in the republic practically impossible for a self-respecting Briton—in fact, of doing indirectly what would have been a clear breach of agreement had it been done directly.

In August, 1899, the British troops in Natal amounted to about 6,000. In September they were increased by a whole infantry battalion, and several more battalions of infantry and batteries of artillery were sent from England, India, and Egypt, and Sir George White went out as general in command. The Boers were also arming rapidly, and arms and ammunition were

arriving daily at Delagoa Bay and the Cape, and being forwarded to Pretoria. The Boers talked of British desire for annexation. The British element feared a Dutch conspiracy—with the republics as a nucleus, but aided by Cape Dutch—to oust our rule from South Africa.

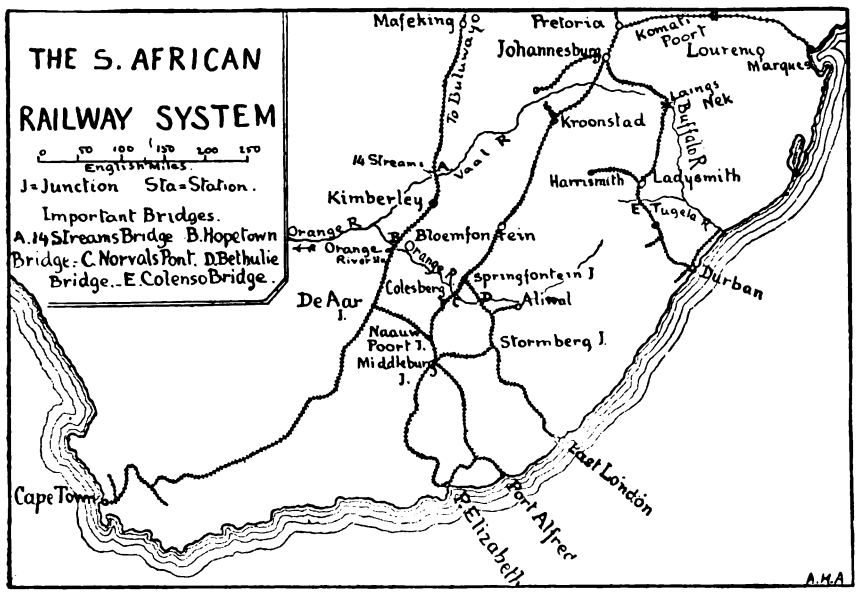
No doubt many Boers had, since Majuba and the Convention of Pretoria, been in the habit of thinking and speaking contemptuously about Britain and the British. They treated the British Outlanders with contempt, often actively and offensively manifested. They regarded the British army as a collection of weaklings, led by idiots: the men being unable to ride, shoot, or take cover—men who would surrender after the first few shots. In fact, of military prestige in South Africa the British had none. The common Boers regarded the Convention of Pretoria not as a magnanimous and generous act, but as a treaty extorted at the muzzle of their rifles. And, no doubt, they expected to be able to defy the British power with success, if not with ease, in view of their increased armaments. Whether Presidents Kruger and Steyn, Mr. Reitz, and General Joubert, who had travelled and seen something of Britain's resources, shared the sentiments of their ignorant countrymen, cannot be told.

Matters were brought to a crisis in the month of September. The British Government became insistent. Sir W. Penn Symons, at that time in command of the forces in Natal, moved his troops up country to Ladysmith—now a place of historical military interest—and formed a base camp there. This, no doubt, was by way of precaution against a raid; for, as may be seen from the map (p. 5), this part of Natal runs up between the Free State and the Transvaal, and is open to an attack from both sides at once. Moreover, in this neighbourhood are the coalfields of the colony. In September Colonel Moller was sent nearer to the border, to Dundee, with an advanced column; and so quietly was the march made that the townsfolk's first intimation of the presence of troops was the roll of the drums playing them into camp. On October 11th General Symons took over this column.

There is no doubt that these military movements, and especially the increase in garrison, caused much searching of heart amongst the Boers, and afforded them a ground of complaint. "Here," they said, "we are negotiating, and at the same time you increase the number of your troops"; and Cronje, one of their generals, rode into Dundee to ask the meaning of it, and they, too, massed commando after commando on the border. Eventually, on the 9th of October, 1899, Sir Alfred Milner received from Secretary Reitz, of the Transvaal Executive, an Ultimatum. This extraordinary document demanded an assurance that no more British troops should be sent into South Africa; and gave Her Majesty's Government forty-eight hours within which to make up their minds. The Colonial Secretary replied that such terms could not even be discussed.

Then came a proclamation by Mr. Steyn, President of the Orange Free State, denouncing Great Britain and officially casting in his lot and the lot of his people with that of the kindred republic. Blood, as we know on the authority of Sir Walter Scott, is thicker than water; but yet the British people were surprised at this defiance from a country with which we had never had a quarrel. But the die was cast. It was the whole Boer race against the British Empire.

In forty-eight hours from the ultimatum, the burghers were on the move.



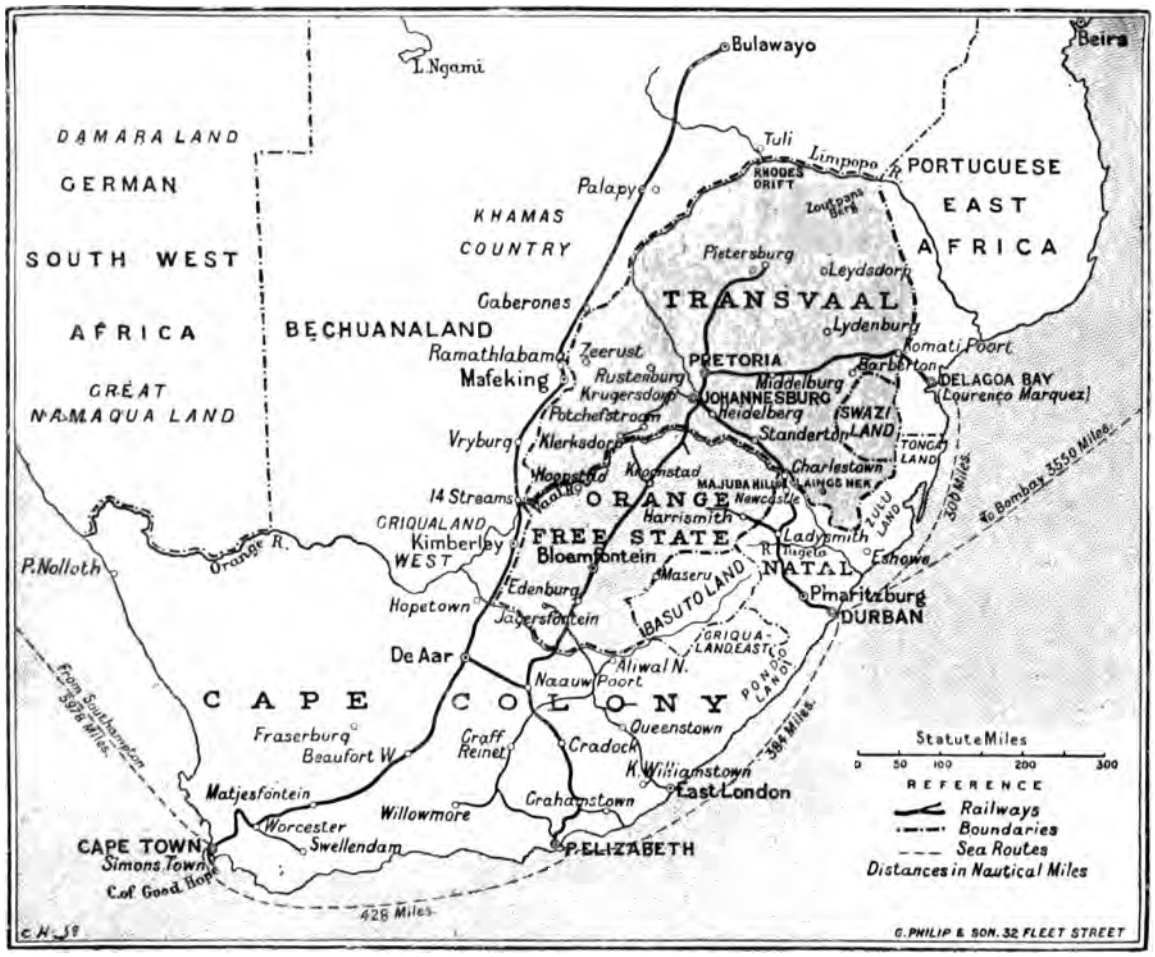
CHAPTER III.

THE BURGHERS MAKE READY—THEIR FIRST MOVES.

THE military system of the Boers is simple. It is complete. Every burgher, from sixteen years old and upwards, must be ready to turn out at any time and fight for his country. Each district is under the permanent command of a person called a field cornet, and over these are the commandants. When the word arrives, "Mobilise!" the field cornet sends round to every farm, naming the day and time appointed; and at that time there troops to the place of meeting a host of men, mounted on hardy, narrow-backed ponies, each carrying his rifle and bearing two days' provisions for himself and his mount.

The men's provisions are very slight, consisting mainly of biltong, or dried meat. Of uniform they have none, but most of the burghers wear wideawake felt hats of much the same pattern; and they all carry a bandolier of cartridges slung over the shoulder. When the men who are due to assemble at one place are called together, they are said to be "a commando."

The peculiarity of the Boers as a fighting force is this: the unit is not the commando, or the company, or the squadron, but the individual. For another thing, they have no infantry and no cavalry. All are mounted and armed with the rifle only, forming an army of mounted infantry. Our army, and the other troops of the world, fight mostly on foot, using cavalry for pursuit and scouting, and the British army had a few mounted infantry for



MAP OF SOUTH AFRICA, SHOWING SITUATION OF THE TWO DUTCH REPUBLICS.

scouting purposes. The republics had also at their disposal a very considerable quantity of artillery.

In addition to the burghers, there were several thousands of foreign mercenaries, as well as some volunteers, mostly non-British Outlanders. Their Army was armed, for the most part, with the very latest magazine rifle,* the Mauser. A few carried, of their own accord, the Martini-Henry, an excellent weapon, but not a magazine gun. It neither carries so far nor so straight as the Mauser, but its bullets are more deadly.

Of artillery, they had at least 70 or 80 pieces of cannon, all of the latest makes and patterns, including five taken from the Jameson raiders; and they had Maxims and other machine guns.

As soon as war was declared the fiery cross was sent round. The men mustered even above strength; for many old men over sixty insisted upon going to the front. In a day or two every field cornet had served out Mausers and cartridges.

As for waggons, horses, and other means of transport, they were simply seized. It was the law of the Dutch republics that any and every thing required for war could be taken by the field cornet in the name of the State, and this without payment. And so provisions of all kinds, harness, horses, and, indeed, anything that might be required for equipping or feeding the army, was seized on the instant and packed off to the base of operations. This method of procedure is known as "commandeering." Johannesburg was gutted by the process.

* A "magazine" rifle is one which need not be loaded with each cartridge separately. A Mauser has an arrangement near the breech, into which five cartridges can be slipped, allowing the soldier to fire five times without wasting time in reloading.

Before the ultimatum the Transvaal Government began to "commandeer," and as early as the 2nd of October seized half a million pounds in gold, the produce of Rand mines, on its way to England. Later they took other bullion and specie, the property of British subjects. A mad rush for the frontier took place on the part of British subjects in Johannesburg and other places on the Rand, and trains were crowded with men, women and children on the way to Capetown, Natal, and Delagoa Bay.

So complete were the preparations, so ready was the response of their citizen army, that on October 11th, immediately the ultimatum expired, they were waiting on the frontiers, and ready to cross into British territory. One army, composed of about four commandoes, was sent to the eastern border, where the previous war had been fought, and it menaced Natal. General Joubert, the Commander-in-Chief, led this army. On the west, where British Bechuanaland marched with the northern republic, a force under Cronje, another old warrior of the War of Independence, was gathered. On the west of the Free State a third force massed, having Kimberley as its objective; while another body gathered on the northern border of the Transvaal, menacing Rhodesia, and yet another stood in the south, on the Orange River, ready to enter Cape Colony.

As against these forces, the British had, in Natal, 17,000 men; in Kimberley, 2,500; in Mafeking, 750; in Rhodesia, 1,000; and about 700 at Palapye, in Khama's country. There were also, in the north of Cape Colony, approximately near to the Orange River, some 1,200 troops and mounted police. The composition of the forces was varied, the large majority of troops in Natal being British regulars,

with a sprinkling of Natal Volunteer corps, while the other places had to rely for their defence chiefly on irregular levies, raised in the country. For the present it will be sufficient to note the dispositions in Natal, as this was the most important theatre of operations.

A glance at the Map (p. 26) will show that Natal was peculiarly open to an attack by the allied republics; and that, on the other hand, the allied republics were also in peculiar danger of an attack from Natal. The north-west corner of the colony there takes the form of the letter **A**, of which the apex meets the frontiers of both republics in the neighbourhood of Laing's Nek. This nek the Boers seized and strongly fortified. On one side of the **A** is the Transvaal, and on the other the Orange Free State. Along the base of the **A** runs the Tugela River.

Many military strategists considered that a small force on the defensive ought to abandon the whole of the district, taking stand at the base, on the Tugela; but this is not what Sir George White did. He found his forces spread from Estcourt, south of the river, up to Dundee, which, to continue our figure, is well up in the **A**, rather past the cross-bar. He had his main camp at Ladysmith, sixteen miles north of the Tugela, and here he had with him the 21st, 42nd and 53rd Field Batteries of the Royal Artillery; count six guns to the battery. Of officers and men, each battery requires 181: being five officers, commanded by a major, twenty-one non-commissioned officers, and 155 men—gunners, drivers, smiths, and so on. Supposing these to have been in full complement, there would be eighteen guns and 543 men.

The field gun is a breechloading weapon of great force as compared with its weight, which is only 7 cwt.; but for purposes of action it must be counted as weighing a ton and a half more, that being the weight of carriage, limber, etc. It is intended for use in the field—not in sieges—and can be moved about rapidly. Its effective range is nearly three miles, or, to be accurate, about 5,000 yards, and it throws shrapnel shell. Shrapnel is a shell filled with bullets. To put the figures in a nut-shell, a field gun in Trafalgar Square could land shells with the utmost ease in the Mansion House, could sweep Euston Station, or clear the crowd off London Bridge.

Besides, there were fourteen guns, mostly muzzle-loading, and incomparably inferior to the R.A. Field Battery guns, manned by men of the Natal Artillery and Natal Naval Reserves.

Of cavalry, Sir George White had two regiments, the 19th Hussars and the 5th Lancers—about 1,000 in all. And of infantry, he commanded five battalions of about 1,000 men each: the 1st Battalion of the Liverpool Regiment, the 2nd of the Gordon Highlanders, the 1st Battalion of the Devonshire Regiment, the 1st Gloucesters, and the 1st Royal Irish Fusiliers, all armed with the Lee-Metford * rifle. The last-named, the "Faugh-a-Ballagh Boys," were, however, sent to Dundee before the first battle. One company of

* The Lee-Metford, or Lee-Enfield, is a magazine rifle, whose magazine enables ten shots to be fired without reloading. It is sighted to 2,800 yards, but will carry farther. In range it is about the same as the Mauser, but the Mauser bullet leaves the muzzle much faster than the Lee-Metford, and therefore, at a short range, penetrates more easily. I have seen Mauser wounds, where the bullet has gone clean through a limb (*e.g.* at the knee), and eight weeks afterwards nothing is to be seen except two little red spots on the skin, something like week-old vaccination marks In another case, the bullet went through the brain, and the wounded man recovered. The Mauser is what a surgeon would call a "humane weapon."

Royal Engineers (the 23rd), about 100 officers and men, made up the Regular fighting line ; and in addition there were troops and companies of Natal Carbineers, Imperial Light Horse, Natal Mounted Rifles, and Border Mounted Rifles—the last-mentioned being mounted infantry of the stamp of the Boers themselves. Nor must we forget the Hospital Corps.

To Dundee, some forty miles in a north-easterly direction from Ladysmith, General Symons had gone up to take command of three field batteries of the R.A., the 18th Hussars, the 1st Battalions of the Leicestershires and King's Royal Rifles, and the 2nd Battalion of the Dublin Fusiliers. He was, as I have said, reinforced before the 20th of October by the 1st Battalion of the Royal Irish Fusiliers, sent on from Ladysmith. He also had with him a squadron of Natal Carbineers and Umvoti Volunteers. Also a field hospital (forty officers and men). General Symons had sent on to Glencoe a part of his force, practically a picket—Glencoe being about five or six miles further south-west of Dundee, and thirty miles from Ladysmith.

At Colenso, sixteen miles south of Ladysmith, on the Tugela River, there were some of the Natal Carbineers and Naval Volunteers, and also Durban Light Infantry Volunteers ; while at Estcourt, twenty-seven miles away from Colenso, was a small Volunteer force of the Natal Royal Rifles and Naval Volunteers. At both places were rather out-of-date artillery and two or three Maxim guns.

The main railway line of Natal (*see* Map, p. 25) runs from Durban, the great seaport, west to Pietermaritzburg, the capital of the colony, and thence north-west through Estcourt and Colenso to Ladysmith. Thence, there is a line through into the Free State to the west, and one north to the Transvaal. The first important place on the line past Ladysmith is Elandslaagte, some fourteen miles distant ; and then comes Glencoe, which is a junction ; for here a branch line, five miles long, to Dundee joins the main line. Newcastle is the next important town north—not a very large one according to European ideas, since its population is under 2,000—and is about fifty miles from Glencoe, on the main line. From here the rails run on to Johannesburg and Pretoria. It should be stated that in this northern angle of Natal there is coal, and pits are worked in and around Newcastle, Dundee, and Elandslaagte.

You will see from these facts that General White was trying to guard the railway and keep it open for the supplies and reinforcements which could be rapidly sent along it from the sea. You will also see that he had a very long line to guard —from Dundee to Estcourt being sixty miles. From a military point of view, it was a very hazardous thing for a general having the weaker force to attempt to hold such a long line of communications, when it is borne in mind that the enemy knew the country quite as well as, if not better than, he did ; and especially that he was open to attack on three sides—east, north, and west.

General White needed neither the military critics of Fleet Street nor those of Berlin to tell him how hazardous was the course he was adopting. He knew it only too well. When he first arrived in Natal, he saw the danger at a glance. "Why, then," you will say, "did he not abandon this line in favour of another ?"

A pertinent question ! And the answer is—"The Queen's Regulations."

By No. 29 of the 2,000 odd regulations laid down by the War Office for the

A CANDIDATE FOR THE VICTORIA CROSS.

better government of the Army, it is provided that although in case of invasion of a colony "the officer commanding the troops becomes alone responsible for their distribution and direction," at the same time he is to "consult with the governor of the colony," and "will incur special responsibility" if he moves or stations his troops in a manner represented by the governor to be undesirable to the safety and welfare of the colony.

When Sir George White, along with Sir Archibald Hunter, his chief of staff, arrived in Natal, he found Möller up at Dundee with troops. He at once "consulted with the governor," as he was bound to do. And the governor, Sir W. Hely-Hutchinson, emphatically objected to the withdrawal of the Dundee column. It would, he said, be very likely to be regarded by the natives as a defeat or sign of fear; and they might cause disturbances. Moreover, it would be a distinct discouragement to loyalists, and an encouragement to any disloyal colonists.

In fact, he represented the political dangers of such a withdrawal so forcibly that the general, much against his better military judgment, declined to "incur special responsibility" by moving his troops back to Ladysmith.

Moreover, it should be borne in mind that the effective strength, especially in artillery, of the Boer forces had been seriously under-estimated by the home authorities. General Penn Symons had made the same mistake, for he estimated that the reinforcement of 10,000 men sent in September would be quite enough to enable him to hold Natal. Another point to be noticed is that at the time Ladysmith was made the chief camp, nobody could have had any idea that war would break out on the 11th of October. Had we taken the offensive, Ladysmith was the one place from which to attack the Free State on the Natal side; and Dundee would have made a good base for a column to be sent into the Transvaal by way of Commando Drift* or Landman's Drift, on the Buffalo.

On the afternoon of October 11th, the Free State Boers began the war by seizing the Natal train between Ladysmith and Harrismith. On the 12th, also, a large Free State force marched through the Tintwa Nek in a straight line for Ladysmith, and another force, this from the Transvaal, entered Natal at the north-east corner by way of Laing's Nek. The Johannesburg contingent, chiefly foreigners and Afrikanders, about 1,800 strong, marched down through the Free State and made for Biggars Berg, near Dundee.

On the 13th, the northern party occupied Spitz Kop, a hill on the Free State border, some fifteen miles from Newcastle. The next day they were in that town. Nobody knew exactly what they were doing; but it was evident that they intended to cut in and seize the railway on the one hand, and turn the left of the British forces on the other. The turning of the left indicates that they were trying to attack General White in the rear of the left wing of his army, while the commandoes advancing on the railway from Newcastle attacked him in the front. On the 18th, a week after the expiration of the ultimatum, the first shots were fired in Natal. A patrol of Imperial Horse was out scouting, and came across some Boer scouts near Acton Homes, some seventeen miles west of Ladysmith. Here Lieutenant Gennell was shot in the leg—the first soldier of the Queen to shed his blood in this war in Natal.

* *Drift* means a ford, where a river can be waded by men on foot or horseback.

GORDON HIGHLANDERS RESTING ON THE NEWCASTLE ROAD ON THEIR WAY TO ELANDSLAAGTE.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BATTLE OF ELANDSLAAGTE.

IT was not intended to be a battle at all. Clearly understand that. It was only a "reconnaissance in force" in the first instance, yet it turned out to be the most glorious success for our arms in the early part of the war. It came about in this way:—

On the 18th of October a party of Imperial Horse encountered the enemy at Acton Homes; and on the same day another party of the same indefatigable, hardy volunteers met with another lot of the same at Mr. Bester's farm, hard by, and lost—a hat! From theirs and others' information, General White knew that he must expect a body of 9,000 men or so from that direction.

On Thursday, the 19th, came further

news, this time from the north, on the railway, that the enemy had torn up some rails and captured a train at Elandslaagte. This indicated a force in the north-east, but it was not known whether it was merely a party of the Bester's force or another contingent; and so, on Friday, what time the news was coming over the wires from Dundee "Infantry storming position," General French, that dashing cavalry leader, was ordered out with a column on the north-east, to look after the Boers at Elandslaagte. He took with him, at first, the 5th Lancers, some Natal Carbineers, and Border Mounted Rifles as cavalry; some of the 2nd Gordons, the 1st Devons, and the 1st Manchesters by way of infantry. There were also the 42nd and 21st Field Batteries of artillery. After marching about four miles the infantry and artillery were left behind, and the general pushed on with his cavalry for another five miles. Here, again, he halted, and merely sent forward some Lancers as scouts; and these managed to "locate" the enemy at Elandslaagte, behind the railway station. Four Boer outposts were captured, two of them by one Lancer upon his own account. He appears to have frightened them by riding down on them at full speed with lance at the charge, and they surrendered.

Darkness set in. No fighting that day.

But Saturday, before daybreak, saw French off again, with some Imperial Light Horse, a battery of Natal gunners, fifty men of the Manchester Regiment, and an armoured train. Creeping forward, they came in sight of Elandslaagte. Now the object of a reconnaissance is to find out where the enemy is, what his strength is, and, if you can, what sort of a position he has, also whether he means to fight. Pretty soon our fellows found out all these things; and they found, too, that somebody could train a gun. For hardly had the Natal guns unlimbered and opened fire on the station than a shell came from a gun two thousand yards beyond it, and dropped nearly on a gun. Another scattered earth over the train. The Imperials advanced and captured the station, but the shell-fire was too heavy for them to hold it, so, having "drawn the enemy," the reconnoitrers retired on their main body. The general saw, and learned from prisoners taken at Elandslaagte station and village, that this was not a body acting in conjunction with the 9,000 in the west, but an independent commando. (See Map, p. 5.)

GENERAL FRENCH.
(Photo: Lambert Weston, Folkestone.)

He at once resolved to fall on them and crush them ere they could be reinforced, and with that object telegraphed back to

Ladysmith for reinforcements immediately. At 9 o'clock half a battalion of the Devons and half the Manchesters set out by train, and a squadron of the 5th Lancers and one battery (the 42nd) came by road. These reached General French at about half-past eleven.

They were not enough, though, by about half, and so the general sat down to wait for more. The cavalry dismounted and picketed their horses. The Imperials indulged in a sleep, and they wanted it; for they had been on horseback the best part of eighteen days. They had only reached Ladysmith from the west on Friday night, but had volunteered to go out with General French at three the next morning. Stalwart men these; Outlanders, some; men who lived in the country; men who hated the Boers as heartily as the Boers hated them. Hard riders, tireless fighters, they meant to be in the front. So for a couple of hours they laid down and slept, that they might not weary in the combat.

Too short their slumbers, for at half-past one it was "Mount!" And the stalwart, sunburnt men shook themselves in their saddles, and set their faces like granite; for soon they would be at death-grips with the enemy so peculiarly theirs. They were to win honour that day—all of them. What recked they if some should lose life?

The battery (42nd) was moved forward now, along by the side of the railway, F Company of the Imperials supporting. The Natal gunners followed with some Mounted Rifles; and, even as the movements were being made, more trains full of men in khaki arrived—the rest of the Manchesters and the remainder of the Devons; and last of all, half a battalion of Gordons. These were in the kilt—the only spot of colour in the force.

Gallant Gordons! In vain had they been urged to lay aside the tartan when facing those farmers' deadly rifles. "No! we have carried this kilt in honour round the world. We have stormed Spanish heights. We have scaled Afghan mountains. Our bayonets have pierced deep into the ranks of Napoleon's finest soldiers, and drunk the hearts' blood of the bravest warriors of Asia. And everywhere we have worn the kilt—always, ever since we were first enlisted. And shall we now blench for the marksmanship of a parcel of African Dutchmen?"

And so they went to battle joyfully and proudly. But they paid the price of their pride.

As the troops moved forward with laugh and jest and grim determination, news had reached them of the storming of Talana. Should the Irishmen and the 60th have all the glory? No! Scotland and Lancashire and the Western men would show their mettle too.

"Yon's a grand position to defend, Donald!"

"And a grand position to storm, Jock!"

"This is going to be a 'ard job, Bill." (Grunt.) "A 'ard job, I say, Bill." (Grunt.) And along the line and through the column one word was on every lip, and that word "Majuba." The Boers may have thought that the memory of Majuba would make the "*rooineks*" quail. Not a bit. They remembered it; but it was not with dread. It was with a grim, unholy joy that now had come the time to show these marksmen what British soldiers could really do.

At 3 o'clock the main battle began. There had been before this some excellent and plucky work by the Imperials, four troops of whom attacked the southern end of the kopje ridge on which the enemy

"A SHELL DROPPED ON THE LIMBER OF THE GUN" (*p.* 38).

was drawn up; and their rifles were speaking before the rest of the troops got into action. The Imperials had dismounted for the purpose of storming this ridge, and they took the position in great style. Curiously enough, too, they had no one hit, though the Boers kept up a hot fusillade.

The 42nd Battery had limbered up, and gone at a great pace to the extreme right of the Boer position. There they found a kopje occupied by the enemy, and the range was easy. As with a wave of the hand the battery was ready, and a shell soared through the air and burst on the kopje. Then another, a third, and a fourth. And as the shrapnel burst, throwing forth a terrific shower of bullets, the Boers could stand it no longer, and turning, they bolted back to their main body. But not all.

The main body was on a ridge or range of kopjes, the two highest of which, with the pass or nek connecting them, formed the main position. On the smaller kopje the Dutch artillery was placed; and, let it be said, never were guns fought more bravely or fired more accurately. Only, it seemed, the contractor who filled the shells was a rascal, which was a special dispensation of Providence for General French. The plan of attack was simple in the extreme. It was to cannonade the heights, first trying to silence the enemy's artillery, and then to deliver an old-fashioned frontal attack with the bayonet. Time was short, so that it was imperative that our batteries should make quick work. From 3 o'clock to 4, shell dropped on those heights. The Boer guns were silenced in a quarter of an hour; but they shifted their position, and began again. At 4 the bugles sounded the advance, and the footmen attacked.

Colonel Hamilton addressed the infantry brigade:—"Men! Do you see that hill? You must take it before sunset!" A growling "We will!" ran along the ranks. "I'm sure you will!" A fierce hurrah! broke forth; and with teeth set the men marched out.

The Devons had the post of honour—always also the post of danger. Led by Major Park, they boldly attacked the enemy in the front. Three companies led the way, supported by the other four. The first three companies were in extended order, spread over about a quarter of a mile, and the reserves were in single rank, with still wider intervals between the men. Coolly and steadily they advanced to the foot of the hill, across the open veldt. Soon they found themselves exposed to a shell fire. But the Boer gunners' aim was somewhat disconcerted by the fire from our batteries, and at first the shrapnel burst too high to do damage. They found the range eventually; but a company in extended order is no very good target, and the only men hit were three in one of the rearmost companies.

After 800 yards of this, during which no man blenched or faltered, the order was given to halt, take cover, and commence firing. Some ant-heaps dotted the plain, and behind these the Devons took cover. Much they needed it, for they were now well within range of the Mauser rifles held by the defenders. Rush! Lie down! Rush! Lie down! One section of men rushed to the next bit of protecting cover, while the rest kept up a fire on the Boer riflemen. There were no words of command, no volleys. Every man fired when he pleased—as often as he got a glimpse of a bit of a Boer or the flash of a rifle. Then the firing party rushed for cover, those in advance now using the rifle to protect them. Thus the advance con-

tinued until more than half the distance was covered. Then was heard the ringing note of the "charge." The Devonshire buglers took up the call, and, rushing from the earth spattering about them, bullets whistling over and around them; and now they meant to try that last resource of the British soldier—the cold steel.

TRUMPETER JOHN JAMES SHURLOCK (*p.* 45).
(*Photo: Ernest Smith.*)

cover with bayonets fixed, the line started up the last 800 yards of the hill at "the double." *

For half an hour they had been lying there exposed to that terrible rifle-fire, Courage and cold steel—these have, from Marlborough to Roberts, been the stand-by of that all-conquering infantry.

Let us now for a moment look at the other parts of the battlefield. When the Devons began their march across the

* "The double" is a trot

veldt, Colonel Ian Hamilton, who commanded the infantry, had the Manchester regiment (half a battalion) on the right, with the half-battalion of Gordons in support. These were to climb the ridge on the left, not, as the Devons did, taking the whole face of the hill, but keeping along the ridge. Do not forget that at the end of the ridge was the steep kopje. As these battalions formed for the attack they were exposed to a scathing artillery fire, and the Boers put a good many shell into them. But again the shells did not burst—or, if they did, exploded almost harmlessly. Here it was not shrapnel that was employed, but common shell.* Colonel Schiel, a German, and gunnery instructor to the South African Republic, was in charge of their artillery, having eighty German gunners under him. And well he and they fought that day; but they were no match for our field batteries.

Hardly had Schiel's guns spoken when the 21st Battery dashed up to the centre position, between the Devons and the Manchesters. The German gunners saw them, and timed their arrival to a nicety, for hardly had they reached their ground when a shell dropped on the limber of a gun. The effect was disastrous. Captain Campbell, of the Artillery, was hit by a bullet, Lieutenant Manley was hit in the head by a fragment of shell, an ammunition waggon was upset, a horse killed, another wounded. But it might have been worse. The gun was not disabled.

* Shrapnel is a hollow, conical shell filled with bullets, and having a time fuse. When used properly, it bursts in the air just in front of the enemy. The bullets, having the same velocity as the shell, sweep and scatter like a charge of small shot. Common shell is a case filled with powder. It is timed to explode when it touches the ground, and the fragments of the shell fly about.

Right wrathfully and masterfully the battery replied, hurling shrapnel at the Germans; and in exactly six minutes from the first shot the enemy's guns were silenced. Again they shifted position and recommenced. Dour, obstinate fellows, these German gunners.

Meanwhile our cavalry was doing its best to outflank the Boers, so as to cut off their retreat. The 5th Lancers, a few of the Imperial Light Horse who had not dismounted, and a squadron of the 5th Dragoons were there; and these, when the fight was won, turned the retreat into a rout.

The route to be followed by the Manchesters and Gordons was over successive ridges of kopjes, which would, after the last had been won, land them about 600 yards away from the Boers' left flank—that is, they could come in from our right to the enemy's left, while the Devons attacked in the front. Shell whistled overhead, and here and there a man ducked his head involuntarily.

These ridges of kopjes were terribly expensive, and were rendered doubly so to the Gordons by two facts—one, that they were in much closer order than the rest of the troops, and the other that their dark kilts formed an excellent target. They stood out with much greater distinctness than the earth-coloured uniforms of the other regiments.

As with the Devons, so with these. Some fired while others rushed or crawled a few yards ahead. Then these fired while those crawled, crept, and ran. On the same flank with the Gordons and Manchesters were the dismounted troopers of the Imperials, using their carbines.

On went the heroes, over the rocky ground, strewn with huge grey boulders. Up a hill. This was managed easily.

Then some level ground ; and as the men dragged themselves over this, they first felt the severity of the Boer rifle-fire. Down they dropped, men and officers ; but Dick-Cunyngham, their colonel, led the way for the Gordons, and the Manchesters kept level with them. A dip down—some breathing space here—and then another climb. And then what a task ! More than 200 yards of flat ; but flat it was impossible to hurry over, for it was strewn with great stones as though some millions of tons of paving-stones had been thrown down anyhow. Two hundred yards of this ; and then a climb up the side of a kopje. *The* kopje. The one they had come to attack. And in that kopje were a thousand men armed with the deadliest weapons. And the 200 yards, every inch of it, was plainly open to the Boer sharpshooters. No cover or protection was there for that matchless infantry. Still, they faced it. Men dropped, not in ones or twos but in scores, but still they stumbled on. It was sickening. Dick-Cunyngham fell, shot in two places.

Two men stood upright in the shower and made for the chief.

"Keep on, boys ! Never mind me !" But they picked him up between them and carried him behind a boulder. They ought to have been shot in as many places as they had checks in their kilts, but their hour had not yet come. They laid their commander down and lit his pipe. "I'll not forget this," said he. "Now get ahead !" And there he lay as his men tottered and stumbled past him, crawling on their bellies, dodging behind boulders, but ever on.

And ever and anon the plucky commander took his pipe from between his teeth and shouted encouragement to his brave lads. "We'll give them one for you, sir—never fear."

A sergeant falls. "Are ye hurt, Burness ?" "De'il a bit, am I." It was but a spent bullet that had struck his sporran : enough to bowl him over but not to penetrate. He is up and at them again. As he leaps a big grey stone, something like a red-hot needle burns the inside of his thigh. Another bullet had struck the sporran. But not a spent one this time. It had glanced off something and passed between his legs. "A near thing !" And again he flounders forward. Fifty yards more and a third bullet strikes him, and this time down he drops right at the foot of the kopje with the lead in his leg.

Here a man threw up his arms and toppled over on his face, his nerveless hand still clasping the rifle. They loaded and fired, and pressed on. The shrapnel whisked into the kopje, but never for a moment did the rifle-fire slacken. Scott-Chisholme, bravest of the brave, colonel and creator of the Imperial Light Horse, disdaining cover, dropped with a bullet in his leg as he was attending to a wounded man. A minute or two afterwards another bullet hit him, this time in the lungs. Yet a third, and this time in the head. From that moment nothing could stop the Imperials. They wept, these strong, stern men, with rage and grief for the death of their beloved colonel. They swore by his memory and all that was dear to them to make the Boers pay for his blood drop by drop. And so they pressed forward into the fighting line.

To make that terribly difficult assault still more difficult, the stony plateau was intersected with barbed-wire fences, and these had to be cut. In some places steel-cased Mauser bullets had saved our men the trouble of wire-fence cutting. But every fence meant a halt, a delay, and the men on the kopje would take more

deliberate aim at the dark tartan line and the khaki-clad Manchesters. At the last few yards the troops, brave as they were, checked for a moment. It seemed impossible to face that hail of lead fired by a foe invisible ; for of the Dutchmen and their mercenaries not a man could be seen.

Must they turn back now? Must they, after all, be routed by those incomparable marksmen? Has the bravest blood in England and Scotland been shed in vain?

Just at that moment out rang the call of Ian Hamilton's bugler. The Manchesters took up the call. Fix bayonets! Charge!

From the front of the hill the note of the Devons ascended. Fix bayonets! Charge! And the drum-major of the Gordons, Lawrence, sounded the onslaught. Charge! Highlanders have never lacked musicians to play them to the combat ; and with a yell and a cheer they followed Lawrence as he leaped to the front.

What a difference that bugle-note made to the weary, lead-pelted infantry! A terrific rain-storm had broken over them, wetting them to the skin—almost, it seemed, to the bone even. Not a bit cared they.

Fix bayonets!

There were now no officers : all were men—except that the officers raced to be first at the top, and the men raced to catch them. There was no formation, no orders. The Devons, cool even under that excitement, kept themselves spread wide. But on the right, Manchesters, Gordons, and Imperials were all mixed together in a much closer formation.

A hundred yards, and yet another hundred. The Devon lads hear the slogan of the Gordons and the cheers of the Manchesters on the right. Up! Boys of the brave western shire! Forward! Let not the Highlanders and the cotton-spinners have all the glory. Show them what Plymouth and Dartmoor, Exmoor and Bideford can do.

And on the left as great a rivalry of honourable daring. Is this worse than Dargai? Was there not Majuba? Ah! Majuba! And as the word buzzed from man to man they rushed on

A bullet through the lungs. He's down ; but we can't stop to help him—time enough for that when we've avenged Majuba. Here a Highlander is hit in the arm. "Good job it's only the left," says he, and he goes for the kopje at the double. Time enough to bind up his wound when he has made these Dutchmen remember Majuba. One of the Imperial Horse is touched by a bullet that grazes his face. It is like a red-hot iron being drawn across his cheek. No heed he takes of the blood as it reddens his khaki. Time enough to staunch it, time enough to feel pain, when he has sent one Boer to his account—a sacrifice to the memory of the valiant Scott-Chisholme. "Where are the Boers?" says he. "Let me get at them!" and he rushes forward. A Manchester lad falls. "Are yer hurt, Sam?" "Got summat down my bloomin' neck!" is the reply. "'Urry up, and give 'em one extra for me!"

And the men who dropped wounded crawled about to one another, and lit pipes and cigarettes, and looked at the dead around them ; and swore roundly, some of them, and wept, even, others of them, for that they could not be in at the slaying on the kopje.

Up they went, until Gordons and Devons, Manchesters and Imperials formed one howling, shrieking line of bayonet

points near the top of the final kopje. A yell ; and at it they went.

From behind his boulder, the colonel of the Gordons hears that appalling shout, and he knows that at last the kilt is about

NATIVE DESPATCH CARRIER CAUGHT BY THE BOERS.

to reap its reward. Oh ! to be there ! To strike one blow ! He raises himself up and walks out of cover. Yes ! there are his men, twenty yards from the top. He staggers on, shouting ; but loss of blood and the weakness of his wounds bring him to earth again. And there he lies, shaking his powerless fist and screaming inarticulately, as though he thought to make himself heard above the din of battle.

But now the defenders' fire ceased ; and a bugle sounded the "Cease fire." It was a Boer bugle, but the blast was so near the Gordons they thought it was meant for them ; and they walked out into the open, upright, to receive the surrender. Instantly a volley swept their ranks ; and then, with one more shout, F Company of the Devons was in the entrenchment, headed by Lieutenant Field. In rushed

Manchesters, Highlanders, and Light Horse, in one torrent of steel. The German gunners stuck to their work till the bayonet pierced them. In vain did bearded Boers try to load and shoot again—the horrid steel was plunged through bone and muscle and sinew ere trigger could be drawn. The Light Horse, having no steel, swung carbine by the barrel, dealing terrible blows with the butt-end.

Slay! That was the word. The pipers skirled; men shrieked "Majuba!" and thrust and stabbed and smote. For a minute only the Dutchmen faced the music; then some cried "Mercy!" and others fled from that terrible steel. Our men were drunk with the lust of blood and of fight—delirious with victory—and they stabbed and slew until an old Boer stepped forth holding aloft a rifle; and from the end of the barrel fluttered a white handkerchief. It was surrender!

Of the enemy who fled, terrible was the fate. The 5th Lancers dashed round upon them, and lances pierced them, making dreadful wounds; and they shrieked and cried quarter—as well they might. It was now dark; but three times the Lancers rode through them, and lance and sword were reddened. The Dragoons, too, let themselves loose.

Our men bivouacked in the field they had so well won; and there was joy in the camp that night. Joy, notwithstanding the groans of the wounded, notwithstanding that officer and comrade were lying stiff and stark out there. It was a terrible roll call. Four officers and thirty-seven men were killed—nearly all in storming the kopje. Of officers, thirty-one, and of men 175 were wounded. Well might it be said: "If this be the price of supremacy, Lord God! we have paid in full!"

And well might people at home, when they read the lists, ask whether it was worth while to make these frontal infantry attacks on entrenched positions—attacks, be it said, which theorists had declared to be impossible in face of machine-gun and magazine-rifle fire.

Again the British infantry had accomplished the impossible; and, as at Talana Hill, had proved to the boastful Dutchmen that marksmanship, splendid rifles, and plenty of ammunition are not the only factors in the fighting of battles. In theory, it is true, infantry ought never to be able to carry an entrenched position except by a flank attack—"turning" the entrenchment—and that only after the trenches have been thoroughly well "searched" by shell-fire for several hours. But, after all, the men behind the rifles are only men, and they have nerves. In this battle, if the Johannesburg commando was to be attacked and defeated before it could join the main body at Bester's or Acton Homes, the attack had to be delivered at once. It was late before General French could attack at all; and this made it impossible for him to shell the kopje for more than an hour—a time altogether insufficient in view of the strength of the position.

But though the victory was costly there was one consolation. It was complete. The contingent was broken up completely; guns, stores, ammunition—all the equipment of the force was captured. Three hundred prisoners, wounded as well as whole, fell into our hands, and about 150 of the enemy were killed. The steel of the Lancers accounted for fifty of these, and most of the others fell to the bayonet.

And if we lost heavily in officers, so, too, did the foe. Judge Kock, a son of their commandant, was killed; so was

Dr. Coster, a lawyer—Hollander by birth—who led the Pretoria detachment. Schiel, the German artilleryman, was wounded and a prisoner; Pretorius also, and De Witt Hamer, and others of their great public men were down. Kock the elder was hit by three bullets. Our men found him lying on the hill, a dignified, patriarchal man, and they brought him into hospital. Like most of the old Boers of good family—for there were a few families from amongst whom all the high officials were selected—Commandant Kock was a very simple man in his habits. Shrewd, and more than shrewd. But in war an honourable foe, as a brave man nearly always is. No one ever imagined, if Boer wounded fired on men who spared them, that Commandant Kock ever countenanced their treachery.

A little party of the enemy had somehow managed to post themselves upon a small kopje at just about rifle range from the new position, and all night these men continued firing. Soldiers, doctors, Indian ambulance bearers, were searching for the wounded, Boer as well as Briton, and carrying them in dhoolies, on blankets slung on rifles, to the captured Boer laager; and whenever these messengers of mercy showed light of lantern or match, the Dutchmen on the kopje fired at the light. Next day, too, when some parties went out to bring in and bury the dead, the little party fired. On this being reported to Kock, the commandant, he wrote a letter reproaching the snipers in no measured terms; and this note being delivered by a British party under a white flag, the firing stopped.

On Sunday it was found that two of the guns captured were two that had been taken from the Jameson raiders at Krugersdorp; and the Devonshires were the more delighted at the capture because of rescuing from the foe a trophy such as this.

Sir George White, the Commander-in-Chief in Natal, had come along from Ladysmith with the reinforcements as the battle began. With the old chivalry of a man of the sword, he declined to supersede General French. "No!" he said, "you have had all the work up till now. Finish the job and have the glory. I will look on." It was the old spirit. You remember how, at that battle in France, when the young Black Prince was winning his spurs, his father, King Edward, sat in a windmill overlooking the field. The young prince being sore pressed, the knights around the king would have dashed to the rescue, but the king restrained them. "Let the boy win his spurs," said he; "we will not diminish his honour." And so, on this day, General White left the honour to his subordinate; and when he telegraphed home to an expectant country the news of the victory, he did not fail to ascribe all the credit to General French. "I attended as a spectator," the message read.

What was the result of this battle? It proved several things. Chiefly it proved that the British infantry had not deteriorated—a lesson already taught by Talana Hill. It proved that, despite theory to the contrary, infantry could still carry positions of strength by direct attack—provided the infantry was of magnificent courage and well led. It proved that the Boers, wonderful riflemen as they might be, were no match for our troops in a hand-to-hand contest.

And it proved that frontal attacks are wasteful.

Kock's brigade, as a fighting unit, was utterly destroyed; and a simultaneous Boer attack from north and west on Ladysmith was prevented, or at least delayed.

Sir George White was left free to help Yule, and the Boers were taught a severe lesson.

COMMANDANT KOCK.

It was, doubtless, the success of the infantry at Elandslaagte and Talana that staved off for so long an assault on Ladysmith. The Dutchmen were not anxious to come again within reach of the "knives stuck in gun-barrels," as they called them.

Numberless stories are told of curious incidents on the field. One man—of the Imperials, too—would not at first face the ascent of that last terrible hill. His teeth chattered, his face paled, and his commander had literally to push him forward. Yet this was the man who, a moment later, was rushing ahead, yelling "Let me get at 'em," the blood streaming off his face the while.

A private in the Gordons thrust his bayonet into a Boer's ribs, with the remark, "That's for Jock." Jock was his friend, now lying on the hill. "And this is for me," added he, as he gave another thrust; and the Boer fell a corpse.

A Light Horseman got so excited when he got into the Boer laager that he swung his carbine round his head and flung it at the foe. It hit an old Boer who was fighting in his shirt-sleeves and an ancient pot hat. Then the Carbineer, being weaponless, picked up a Mauser lying on the ground, and laid about with it.

One Lancer is said to have spitted two Boers who were galloping away on the same horse.

Perhaps the most ghastly sight on the field was a Highlander who had driven his bayonet with tremendous force through the body of a Boer who was kneeling to shoot. Not only did the bayonet go through, but several inches of gun-barrel also. At that moment a bullet struck the Highlander, and crashed through his brain. There were the foes—the Boer still kneeling, with the steel sticking out of his back; and, in front, the Scotchman, the smile of

COLONEL SCHIEL.
(German commander of Boer Artillery.)

victory fixed on his face, and a tiny hole in his forehead.

More than one Dutchman begged for

mercy, and when the foe accorded it, shot him in the back. Bad luck it was for that Boer if he were caught at it. One of them was thrust at by two Manchesters at once, and the bayonets clashed in his lungs.

As the men were lying behind cover, waiting for the "Charge!" most of them pulled out pipe and tobacco, and smoked as if for life. When the signal came they still kept pipe in mouth, and went up the kopje and into the battery smoking—or at least chewing the pipe-stem. It is wonderful, and not to be explained, how a soldier can carry a cutty-pipe between his teeth, often in full blast, and keep it there all the time of a charge. Mr. Parry, in his book on the "Death or Glory Boys," tells of a 17th Lancer who smoked all through the Balaclava charge, and five Russians fell to his single arm. So at Elandslaagte, half of F Company of the Devons bounded at the Boer gunners smoking hard; and, if the truth must be told, cursing and swearing still harder. One of the Manchesters had the bowl of his pipe knocked off, but he held on with the stem between his teeth.

After the kopje was carried, many men dropped who had previously been quite unaware of their wounds. Lieutenant Manley, of the Artillery, had been hit by the fragment of a shell early in the battle. The lump of iron crashed through his helmet, yet he fought his gun to the end, and only then discovered that his skull was battered in.

Perhaps the most remarkable individual exploit of the day was that accomplished by a lad, Trumpeter Shurlock, of the Royal Irish Lancers. This precocious youth of fifteen summers sounded the "Charge!" and then, dropping his trumpet, he seized his revolver and galloped into the fray. With the arrogance of youth he selected a burly Boer, rode straight at him, and shot him through the head. Flushed with success, he galloped at another, and killed him also. Yet a third Dutchman fell to that terrible pistol. A very devastating tempest of a trumpeter, this.

The Devons bore off the chief honours of the day. Not that they were any braver than the Colonials or the Lancashire lads, or the Scotsmen. But they were the best-led that day, and had to bear for a long time the brunt of the Boer artillery fire, lying in an exposed position. And all the way to the top they were exposed. Major Park, in command, gained for himself great glory, and was mentioned in despatches. His disposition of his battalion was perfect—the spaces between the men calculated to a nicety, so as to make the target for the Dutch marksmen as thin as possible. His men were spread out over a frontage of 500 yards; and from the front rank to the rearmost was 1,300—some 950 men spread over 650,000 square yards.

He selected and turned to the best account every single bit of cover that the hill afforded. And the result was that his men, though in the direct front, suffered the least loss. Not for one moment did they lag in the fight. They were the first in at the guns, and their bayonets accounted for the German gunners whom the shrapnel had spared. In this battle, and afterwards in the campaign, the men of Devon proved themselves without superiors amongst the infantry of the world. They were patient; could lie down and let themselves be shot at; could crawl on their bellies at the rate of a mile a day, if need be. And they could charge in loose order with a coolness and a dash never surpassed.

The Gordons paid for their pride. Nor has it been heard that they grudged the

THE IMPERIAL LIGHT HORSE IN A SKIRMISH.

price. Some of them had been at Majuba, and the gay Gordons had nurtured a blood-feud with the Boers ever since. That is why they went in such close order, exposing themselves so recklessly. That is why their pipes screeched so fiercely. No one who has not heard it can credit the effect of the pipes on the fighting soldier. Pipes on the field of battle when the onslaught is sounded seem to be bedevilled. The pipers nearly go mad. And they blow and blow, and produce weird, horrible shrieks such as would transform any Quaker into a bloodthirsty warrior. Imagine the effect on a body of soldiers! To say that the music turns them mad is a mild expression. They become lunatics, raving fiends. The skirl only says to them two words: "Forward! Kill!"

While the Devonshire battalion lost no officers or men killed, and only four officers and twenty-nine men wounded, and the half-battalion of the Manchester regiment five officers wounded and eleven rank and file killed and twenty-six wounded, the half-battalion of Highlanders mourned a fourth of their number. In all, four of their officers and twenty of their men fell to rise no more, and nine officers and seventy-seven rank and file were wounded, besides eight missing. This was an enormous number out of a total strength of less than 500.

The Imperial Light Horse had fought like tried warriors, and for the first time in the war had shown that civilians can face rifle fire as successfully as trained troops. At least—and let us be forgiven this boast—civilians of British blood and lineage.

Their loss amounted to one officer and six men killed and forty-four of all ranks wounded. So great was their ardour that in the final onslaught they even distanced the Gordons, and extorted high praise and admiration from that crack regiment. "Ye're bonny men at the fechtin'." What higher eulogium than this! The skirl of the pipes seemed to get into their blood too, and well they avenged the death of their beloved commander.

Colonel Scott-Chisholme was an old cavalryman, who, though comparatively young, had already commanded the 5th Lancers. Originally he joined the 9th Lancers. That was in 1872, when he was twenty-one years of age. His promotion was fairly rapid, and he was fortunate enough to see some service pretty early in his career. This was in Afghanistan. Twice he was wounded—once at Siah Sung, and again in the defence of Sherpûr; and he was specially mentioned in despatches, and promoted to a brevet majority.

In 1889 he obtained a transfer to the 5th Lancers, who are proud of the title of Royal Irish, and was major of that fine regiment for five years. In 1894 he became lieutenant-colonel,* and continued to act in that capacity for five years down to August of 1899. So that the squadrons which cut up the Boers in the pursuit at Elandslaagte were actually the old comrades of Scott-Chisholme; and one may be sure that their charge was not less fierce, seeing that they also had to avenge the death of an old and beloved comrade.

For Chisholme had been enormously popular with his regiment. He was of that type of soldier known as "keen." No detail was too trifling to escape his notice; no work was too laborious for him to undertake. He had a truly Napoleonic knack of taking an interest in the personal

* Lieutenant-Colonel is the actual commander of a regiment of cavalry; and of a battalion of infantry.

concerns of his men, and every trooper knew that the "old man" never overlooked either good service or breach of duty.

So ardent was he that when war in South Africa appeared imminent, he, having left the Royal Irish, offered the Government to raise in Natal a regiment of irregular cavalry. This he was permitted to do; and, arriving in the colony, he soon got together that splendid force known as the Imperial Light Horse. Most of the troopers were refugees from the Transvaal, and all were tough men, good riders and shots. Though he only had about three weeks to do it in, Colonel Chisholme soon brought his levies to a high state of efficiency; and on the outbreak of the war he and they acted as the eyes and ears of the Ladysmith brigade. They scoured the country for miles, and had the honour of firing the first shot. In his new command the brilliant horseman was no less popular than with his own regiment. He worked them hard, but they bore the hardships without grumbling, because they knew that their commander did not spare himself. They swore by him; they adored him. And they looked upon his death as a personal cause of quarrel for which heavy retribution was to be exacted.

The artillery, cavalry, and staff had come lightly off. Two Lancers were wounded, and one was missing. Besides the two officers mentioned, the 21st Field Battery had three gunners wounded, and the 42nd Battery had only three men hit, two gunners and a driver. One staff officer was shot in two places.

The infantry purchased the glory, and the infantry paid the bill.

CAPE TOWN AND TABLE BAY.
(*Photo: W. H. Pocock & Co., Cape Town.*)

A BRITISH SHELL AND A BOER GUN

CHAPTER V.

EARLY MOVEMENTS IN CAPE COLONY—THE NORTHERN BORDER.

WHEN the war broke out Cape Colony was practically defenceless ; and had the Boers made a raid in strong force and with promptitude, they might almost have reached Cape Town and Port Elizabeth. If not quite.

For the only force to oppose them consisted of some scattered parties of Cape Mounted Police, a few trusty Colonial levies, and a few British regulars. The total force, scattered over the whole colony, did not number more than 3,500 men, exclusive of the Kimberley garrison. At the last moment, on October 11th, a battalion of Northumberland Fusiliers, "The Fighting Fifth," landed at Cape Town—a welcome reinforcement. Nor was there any artillery in the colony, except a few defensive guns of obsolete type. It is also to be borne in mind that Cape Colony was a Dutch colony —that is, the people of Dutch descent, sometimes called Cape Boers, considerably outnumbered the population of British blood. And many held a strong suspicion that a large number of these were disaffected.

Whether or no there had been, as some pretended, a gigantic Boer conspiracy for a rising of the Dutch right from the

Limpopo to Cape Town, cannot now be accurately told. But this is certain: that the Cape Dutch were very bitter against us, so bitter that it is surprising more of them did not rise than actually was the case. There is every reason to believe that had the Orange Free Staters, leaving Natal to the Transvaalers, crossed the Orange River in a body, seized the railways, and marched for Port Elizabeth or the capital of the colony, they would have gathered recruits at every mile.

What they actually did was this: they did nothing for a fortnight—nothing, that is, except gather men on their own side of the Orange and Caledon Rivers and go into laager there! It might have been otherwise had the stalwarts from beyond the Vaal controlled this part of the campaign. Luckily for us, they did not. And so time was gained, during which reinforcements came oversea. The Free Staters assembled at two points—Donkerspoort and Bethulie, these forming their main camps; and from here they menaced the north of the colony and the lines to Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, and East London; but their transport apparently was not in working order—in striking contrast to the Transvaal army—and movements were slow, so that when the invasion did come it could be met; and the invaders were not allowed to penetrate far. (See Map, p. 26.)

If you look at the map you will see, just within British territory, on the Orange River, a place called Aliwal North. This is an important railway centre; and from it a railway runs to East London, the port between Durban and Cape Town. A bridge crosses the Orange River at this point—Frere Bridge, a splendid structure. Hard by, at Bethulie, the Boers massed some 1,200 men. The first thing they did was to send a message to the British in the town, ordering them to prepare hot coffee in the morning. To which the Britishers replied that they would provide for breakfast plenty of cold lead. But all the Boers did was occasionally to gallop up on their side and fire a few shots at midnight.

A good many Cape Dutch farmers forded the stream and joined the enemy. More waited until the invading army should appear. Colesberg, a place about thirty-five miles from Naauwpoort, on the line to Bloemfontein, the capital of the Orange Free State, was a particularly disloyal town; and the British inhabitants were in daily fear of invasion and revolt. The Free Staters, or, rather, small armed parties of them, made almost daily raids into the district and looted the farms of the loyalists.

The first fighting took place on the 15th of October, when a party of Cape Mounted Police, some twenty in number, met a raiding squadron of Boers at Riverton, a place near Barkly West. Shots were interchanged, and the Dutchmen had the best of the little affair. They cut off the police—or, rather, they tried to—and the colonists had to ride hard for their liberty. Two were captured—one being a wounded man.

Naauwpoort, further down the railway line, between De Aar and Rosmead Junction, boasted a few men of the Berkshire Regiment; and these did their best to make the place defensible. You will understand, of course, that it was most important, from the British point of view, that the railway line to the sea should be kept open, so long as the enemy did not get possession and use it for a raid. So the Berkshires, much to the relief of the loyal part of the population, constructed five redoubts, in entrenched positions.

Colesberg was quite indefensible by the

little handful of men who held it for the Queen. They were merely a number of Town Guards, and they had no guns and no military skill. Still, they did not evacuate the town for about a fortnight, and then, finding themselves menaced by a strong force of 1,800 Free Staters, assisted by many of the farmers in the district, they gave up the town and retired on Naauwpoort. This was on November 2nd.

At De Aar, another important railway junction, whence lines branch off to Port Elizabeth, Cape Town, and Kimberley, the Boers had another force ; not in the town, but a little way up the line. The *Times* correspondent relates an amusing incident here. It appears that at one end of a bridge were two Boer sentries ; but their commander left them there for three days without relief. They did not much mind this ; but what they did object to was the fact that he forgot to send them any provisions. For three days our sentries fed them, until at last they got tired of the neglect of their commander, and the pair of them vanished.

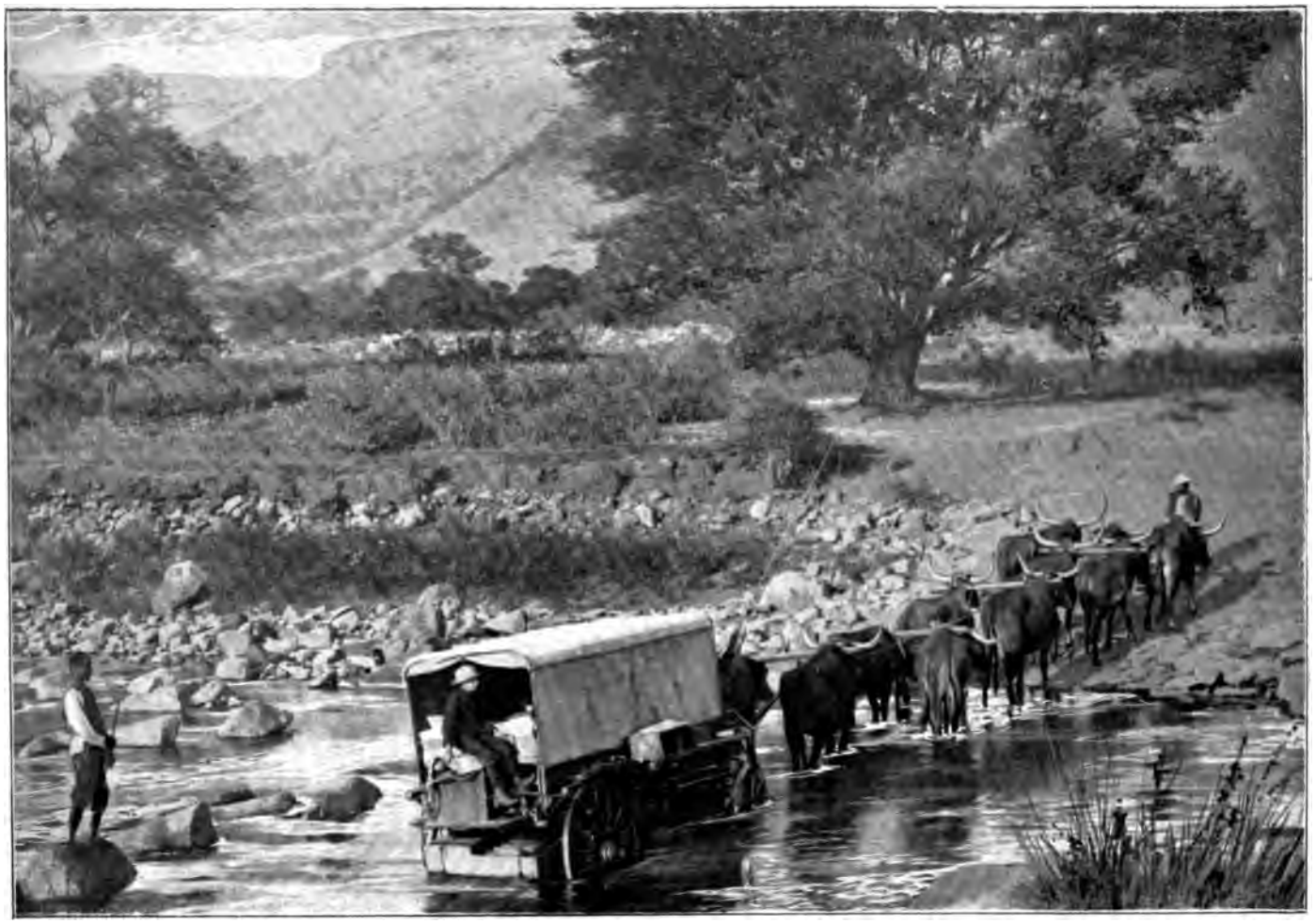
On October 24th a small party of marines and some naval men with guns put in an appearance from Simons Bay, and these patrolled the disaffected districts for a time. A week later an advanced party of Free Staters from Donkerspoort advanced on Colesberg. They crossed the river at Norval's Pont on the 1st of November, crossed and then destroyed Colesberg Bridge on the 8th, and occupied the town itself on the 15th.

On the 14th of November the invasion began in earnest at Aliwal North. The mounted police had abandoned the place, and the Boer contingent of 450 men, armed with Mausers and a Krupp gun, rode over the bridge. More came the next day. The field cornet in command solemnly annexed the whole district, and, the country having now become Boer territory, proceeded to compel the colonials to come in and swell his ranks. As for the local Dutchmen, most of them were willing and anxious to assist the invaders, whilst o. the few non-Dutch who had remained, most of them hurried off to Naauwpoort. Those who did not go wished they had, for they led a most unbearable life.

Very soon the Boers from Bethulie had overrun Barkly East, Ladygrey, Aliwal North, and Jamestown, and were also advancing on Stormberg, captured arms and ammunition, "annexed" the districts, hoisted the flags of the Free State and the South African Republic, and were diligently recruiting their ranks from amongst the rebel Cape Dutch. No doubt, a man only ten yards off, with a pistol, seems more formidable than another armed with a rifle but 1,000 yards away. And I daresay these Northern Cape Boers, seeing the Free Staters armed and in possession and the British authorities powerless to stay the invasion at the moment, forgot to take into account the vast resources of the people whom they defied. But a day of reckoning was to come, and the Dutchmen were to pay dearly for their folly.

Let us not be unjust. There were many Cape Dutchmen who retained their allegiance to the Queen and refused to join in the revolt or to assist the enemy. Had it not been so, it is difficult to say what might have happened. This much is certain—we should have had to reconquer our South African possessions, there would have been a bitter race-war, the carnage must have been dreadful, and South Africa would have taken half a century to recover itself.

The loyalty of these loyalists was the more gratifying, seeing that it was put to



CROSSING A DRIFT.
(Photo: H. F. Cros, Penzance.)

a severe test. Blood is thicker than water, as the immortal Sir Walter says; and when we talk of "disloyal Dutchmen," let us remember that the foe we were fighting was a foe of the nearest in blood to the old settlers of the Cape. The loyalty of these, all through the war, was of the passive kind. It consisted merely of not actively assisting the invaders rather than in helping the soldiers of the Queen; but at such a time even passive allegiance was worth something. And a few of the leading Cape Dutchmen there were who reminded their countrymen that at the hands of the British Government they received favours, under their rule they enjoyed privileges such as no other country granted to its colonies and dependencies. Having some wisdom of a worldly kind, also, they saw what a desperate game the two republics were playing, and in what disaster it must inevitably end.

Besides the commandoes spoken of above, there was a considerable body of Free Staters on the Caledon River. The Caledon is a stream on the south-east of the Free State, and it divides that country from certain British territory known as Basutoland. There the Basutos, a brave and warlike race of blacks, dwell under the supervision, rather than the government, of the British. They are immediately ruled by their own chiefs, but a British official lives amongst them—he is known as the Resident—and he advises the chiefs and exercises a controlling influence over them.

Like all the other native races of South Africa, the Basutos hated the Boers, and in early days had fought them again and again. And when this war broke out, a hundred thousand Basuto warriors offered to march against their ancient foe. It would have been the easiest matter in the world for the British Government to let loose this black torrent. Nor are the Basutos to be despised. Indeed, they would probably make some of the finest irregular light cavalry in the world.

The week after the war broke out, some of the Free Staters tried to come to an understanding with the tribesmen. But the Basuto warriors only sharpened their spears and looked longingly across the Caledon. Now was the time to pay off old scores. Now was the time for loot and plunder. And, besides, would it not be doing a service to their White Mother? Would it not be an act meritorious in her eyes for them to ford the river and let loose their spearmen—men burning with a hatred stored up for half a century!

The British Resident, Sir Godfrey Lagden, had hard work to keep the chiefs in hand. This was a white man's war, he told them. The great White Queen knew well the love and loyalty and bravery of her sons, the Basuto warriors. Some day, perhaps, she would allow them to show it in their own way. But this time they must sit down and watch her white sons fight the battle. True, the enemy seemed to be having the best of it just now; but warriors were hastening from England; and these would soon put a stop to Boer boastfulness. And so, with much tact and watchfulness, the Resident contrived to send his difficult people back to their ploughs. Only he had to give them permission to fight if they were attacked.

Zulus also proffered the assistance of their assegais; and this, again, was declined. There can be no doubt that the Government acted wisely—nay, did the only right thing—when they refused the aid of these dusky allies. The war was bad enough in any case. Guns that killed at three miles, and dynamite trains, and

... to abandon their all,
... the republicans.
... Townsfolk
... which them dis-
... Public meetings
... Excited men and still more
... discussed in public places
... happenings, things past, present,
... to.

... Buller be in Pretoria at Christ-
... he ever get there at all?
... smash Joubert before Buller
... true that 10,000 Boers
... way to Port Elizabeth?
... the rumour that Mafeking
... News, rumours, more
... was no time to be sleepy.
... at leisure if you wished.
... in the buggie with the
... What a diamond!
... size of a paving stone.
... That's Smith, the man
... in the Rand in '85.
... mine one day when
... knives in his kitchen
... sport! I wonder if

... were over-running
... occupying town after
... district. Colesberg
... berg was in danger.
... right down to Dor-
... rated. Naauwpoort
... British force there
... Everywhere
... where gathering re-
... hoisting flags and
... annexation. Here
... ed. There a rail
... was isolated. Mafe-
dressed ...
... over time. For Britain
Outlanders in ... battery and battalion, regi-
... and ministers who ... squadron, across the ocean.

MOUNTED INFANTRY SCOUTING.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WESTERN BORDER—MAFEKING—VRYBURG—KURUMAN—KIMBERLEY.

PERHAPS no part of the war appealed so much to the people at home and abroad as the events at Mafeking.

Until the Jameson Raid, English people had hardly heard of the place, though some well-informed persons knew it to be the principal town in British Bechuanaland. Being on the line of railway which runs from Cape Town to Buluwayo—passing through Kimberley and Vryburg *en route*—it had become prosperous. It is about 145 to 150 miles from Johannesburg as the crow flies, and some 160 from Pretoria. To Johannesburg there runs a fairly direct, good road, through Krugersdorp and over the golden Witwatersrand, commonly called The Rand. To Pretoria there is no very direct road, but what there is lies through fairly open, good country.

The place itself is small, though pleasant enough. Not at all like the kind of "camp" up-country pictured by Bret Harte and other American and Australian writers; but a pleasant country town, quite English in fashion, and but for the fact that the men go about there in wideawake felt hats, and ride rather than walk, a visitor might almost imagine himself to be in some little English market town in Huntingdonshire or Lincolnshire. The population's greatest excitement was the passing through of the Cape Town to Buluwayo train.

There being no railway except this in Bechuanaland, and none in the Transvaal west of Pretoria, Mafeking did, in fact, occupy the position of a market town, and was the great distributing centre, not only for the British possessions on the west, but also for the Marico and Lichtenburg districts of the South African Republic on the east. There Dutch and English settlers alike exchanged the produce of their farms for the manufactured goods of civilisation. There also is the centre for the Malmain goldfields. It is, indeed, one of those commercial outposts established by the British, just as the ancient Romans used to plant their military colonies.

But the Boers regarded Mafeking as something more than a mere trading centre. As I have said before (Chapter II.), they themselves had once cast eyes on Bechuanaland, and had, indeed, resolved to occupy it. Apart, however, from the question of how far it was proper to allow these men further rule over the natives, it was clearly inadvisable to allow them to extend their frontiers to the sea, and so to cut off the British power from further extension north. So we sent Sir Charles Warren, and he occupied it for us. And the Boers regarded Mafeking as a serious menace, standing as it did, right on their borders, within a few days' march of their capital, and the most convenient of "jumping-off places" for an army bent on attacking their interior.

Moreover, should Mafeking fall, British Bechuanaland would fall too; and they might work their will there, and proceed

by the railway to Rhodesia, if they so desired. For, except this one town, the Protectorate was mostly inhabited by Dutch-descended people, who might be induced to desert Queen Victoria for Presidents Kruger and Steyn, once they could be persuaded that those gentlemen would win in the end. And so, when the war broke out, Mafeking found itself the object of a considerable amount of attention; and its little population—they only numbered 1,500 souls all told—were called upon to play a part that made them and their town talked about all over the world.

Vryburg, the capital of Bechuanaland, is situated about 100 miles—ninety-seven, to be exact—farther south on the same railway, just about half-way between Kimberley and Mafeking. If you call Kimberley London, and Mafeking York, Vryburg would be Grantham. The distances are not quite exact, but nearly so. Vryburg was also a point of some importance, as being a railway station; though it had not the strategical importance of Mafeking because the latter place was both nearer and had better roads to Pretoria and Johannesburg.

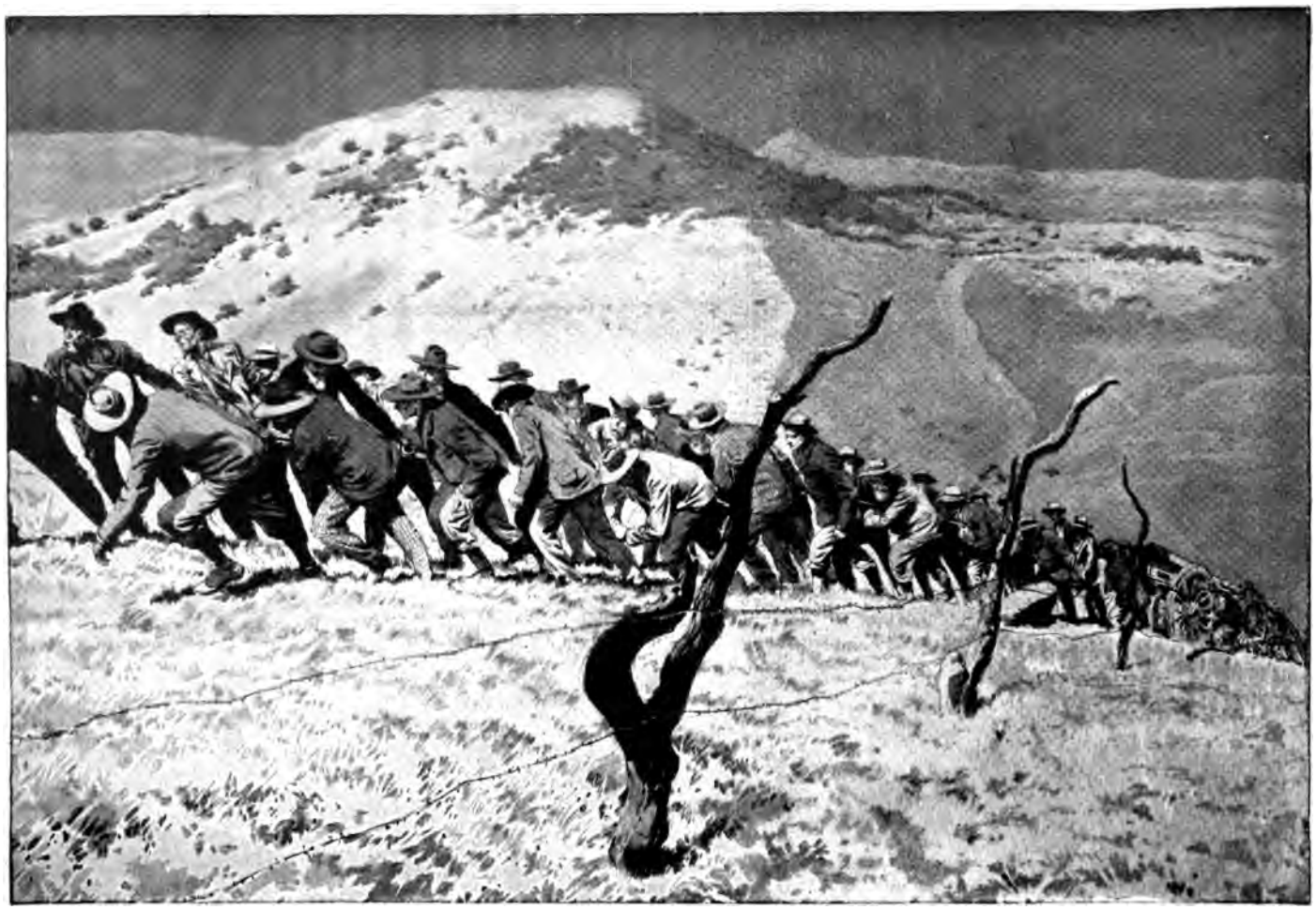
At a very early stage it became obvious that if a war broke out, Vryburg and Mafeking would run great risk of attack. Garrisons of regulars were not sent out; but in September some arrangements were made for their defence.

Mafeking, in particular, received attention. Colonel Vyvyan, of the Royal Engineers, was sent to look after the defences of the town. There were some old forts, built rather as a protection against the natives than as a precaution against attack from white forces; but these had gone out of repair. Colonel Vyvyan, however, put them in working trim once more, mounted artillery on them, and constructed earthworks and entrenchments wherever he found it necessary. He also surveyed the surrounding country and made arrangements for mining the approaches to the town—that is, for laying concealed traps, containing explosives, to the intent that he might blow skyhigh any intruders.

Colonel Baden-Powell, of the 5th Dragoons, had been told off by the War Office for service in this neighbourhood. He speedily enlisted a rare fighting crew of men, composed of Mounted Police, the Protectorate Regiment of Horse, and nearly every single able-bodied man in the town and district. These he trained, in his own peculiar and inimitable style, to ride, to shoot, to scout, to drill. He scoured the country for horses, broke them in as chargers; he gathered provisions and ammunition as much as he was able. He sent off the women and children—all except a few women who declared their intention to "see it out." He caused to be dug bomb-proof shelters. He made a little railway round the town. And, in fact, he prepared for a siege, determined that his little fortress should give the enemy some trouble, anyhow.

And there were many who laughed at the energetic Colonel, and rather sneered at his precautions, despising the enemy profoundly. "Fancy! making all this fuss about the army of Paul Kruger! Why, one would think we were to be invaded by a German army corps!"

Now, Baden-Powell was one of the wiliest soldiers in the British army. The adventures of him were numerous and exciting. He was daring to recklessness, cool, calculating, shrewd, resourceful. At a later time we shall hear more about him. At present we only want to plant in our mind the state of affairs on that



BOERS MOVING A "LONG TOM."

border. One thing ought to be added—that "B.-P.," to use the name by which he soon became known throughout the Empire, was not only a clever leader, he was also a popular one.

With any kind of force it makes a difference whether a commander is personally popular or not. All men fight better under the eye of a leader whom they love as well as admire. And the astute colonel soon gained the affection as well as the confidence of his tiny garrison. All told, they were somewhere about 1,000 men; but they all believed in their commander. Soon they came to have such a reverence for him that it amounted to a kind of adoration. And it became an article of faith in Mafeking that so long as Baden-Powell remained there, not all the Dutchmen in South Africa could take the place. This was a healthy spirit.

Photo:] [*Barnett.*

COLONEL BADEN-POWELL.

Vryburg was evidently regarded as of no importance by our military authorities. I say "evidently," because no preparations were made by the Government. If they trusted to the townsfolk, they made a grievous miscalculation. For, although there were loyalists at Vryburg, the greater part of the population were of Dutch extraction, and would not assist in the defence. In the last days of September and the early part of October, Major Scott, the Commissioner for the district, enrolled some volunteers, and gathered some of the mounted police; and with these he hoped to make some show, at all events. Lee-Enfield rifles were procured, and given to the volunteers; and some of the townspeople promised, if they were called upon, to take up arms in defence of their homes.

The inhabitants, however, had not the same feeling of confidence as their com-

patriots in Mafeking. For one thing, they had no artillery. For another, they had no unity. When one-half of a garrison imagines the other half to be traitors—well! it is long experience which teaches that a house divided against itself cannot stand.

On the 14th of October panic befell. Refugees fleeing from the outlying districts cast terror all round them. Soon the loyal part of the population began to pack up their valuables in waggons; and in the night they fled. The next day news was brought of the approach of the enemy. Sure enough, three bodies of burghers were moving on the town—two from Maribogo, one from Brussels. Their numbers were stated to be about 1,800, and they were reported to have guns.

The panic increased; and, seeing it, Major Scott paraded his police and volunteers. He explained to them the situation, and said: "The business will be a dangerous one. Who will stop and face it? All who are willing to stay with me and defend the town against the enemies of our Queen and country, step forward!"

Six came out.

The rest murmured. They said they were quite willing to fight—that is, in any reasonable way, with any reasonable prospect of success; but they would not tackle a hopeless job. And, they inquired, and with some reason, how are we, without artillery, to defend this place against a force outnumbering us ten to one, and possessing heavy guns? So they evacuated the town. And the few British loyalist civilians who had remained up to that time, seeing themselves abandoned, now fled in all directions. Anything to get away.

And, as they ran, they muttered curses, not loud but deep, on the Government and all its ways—the Government which had neither protected them from the invaders nor provided them with means of escape. No wonder they were bitter. It is no light thing to leave your flocks and your herds, your shop and your stores, and wander into the world, leaving to an alien enemy the fruits of years of steady toil. And, beyond all that, for them, British subjects, living under the Old Flag, to be turned out of their homes by a pack of miserable Dutchmen, by a small detachment of the miserable little army of two trumpery republics! It was bitter enough to be cast forth naked into the world; it was bitter enough to have your wife and children dependent on you, and you without food to give them. But there was one thing even more bitter—the humiliation of it!

The unhappy Major Scott, sick to death at what he regarded as the cowardice of his men, shot himself.

There was a third town in the Bechuanaland Protectorate that offered resistance. This was Kuruman, a small town situate on the river of the same name. It is not, strictly speaking, a border town, being some eighty miles from the Transvaal border, nearly 200 from Mafeking, and 150 from Kimberley. It is north-west from Kimberley, and south-east from Mafeking. Why the Boers should have taken the trouble to go there at all, is difficult to know. It was not on the way to anywhere in particular. It did not threaten them in any way. And it can only be supposed that their attack on it was part of their plan for the raising of rebellion in and the ultimate annexation of the Protectorate. At all events, march on it they did.

Kuruman scorned the example of Vryburg—emulating, rather, Mafeking. Some

twelve score of Bechuanaland Protectorate Police and Volunteers took their courage in both hands and proceeded to fortify their little town. It should be said that Kuruman stands high, and the plucky garrison had no doubt of being able to make the enemy wait a little before they should enter and take possession.

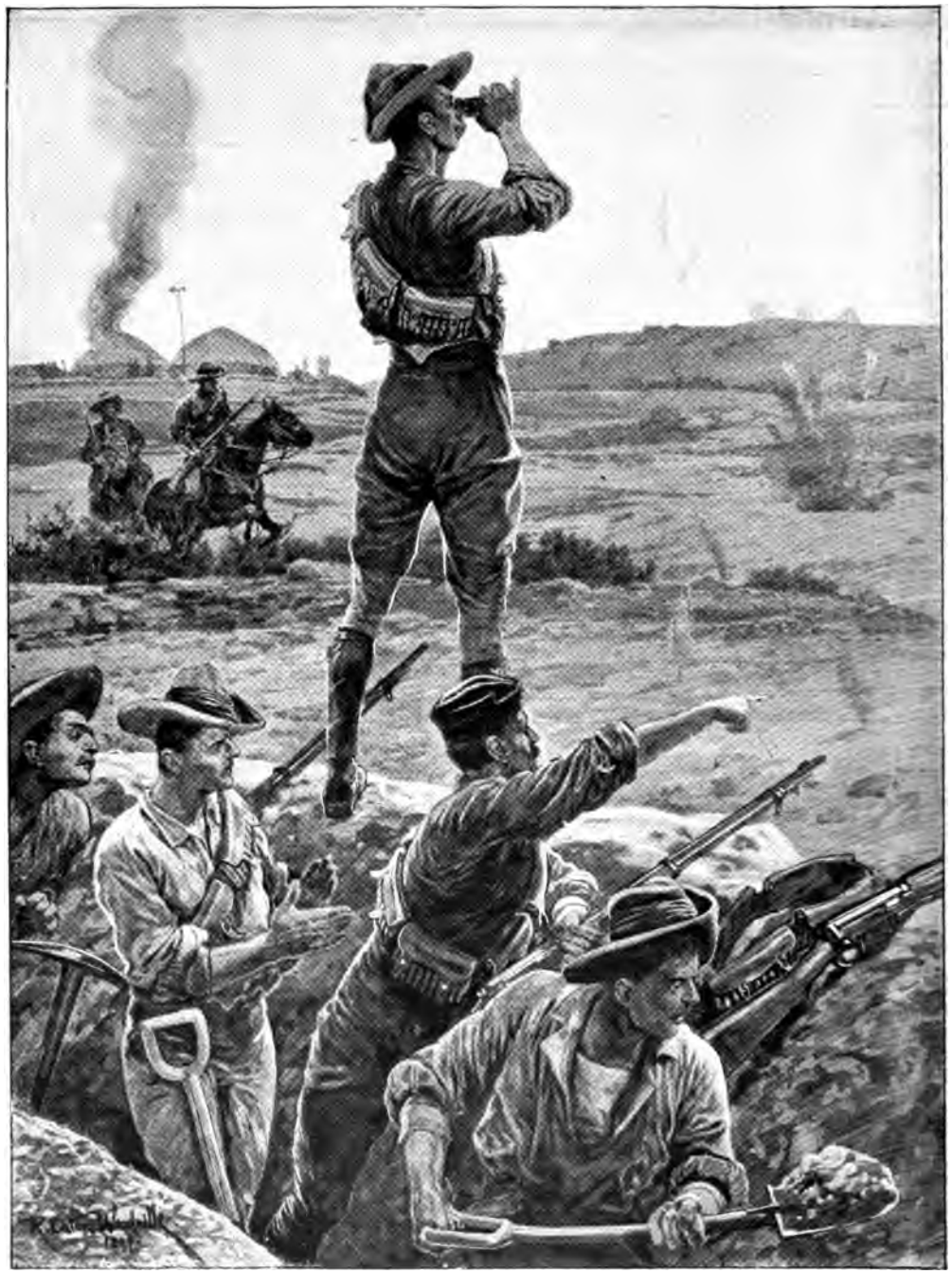
We have, therefore, in Bechuanaland, three isolated positions: Mafeking and Vryburg both on the railway, Kuruman absolutely isolated. Vryburg falls by reason of its unpreparedness and the disloyalty of its inhabitants, and that without striking a blow; but the other two places, though not very well garrisoned, settle themselves down to a stern and stubborn resistance. Let us see how they fare. And first, Mafeking.

From the end of September there had been nothing in Mafeking except what old play-books call "alarums and excursions." Any moment war might break out; and the first to be heard of it at Mafeking might very well be a cannon-shot. At that time, many people in England were hoping and believing that there would be no fighting: not so the Mafekingers. They knew that the summons had gone round to the burghers; and on the 2nd of October they knew that these burghers were assembling at Lichtenburg, armed to the teeth. Now a commando at Lichtenburg could only have one point at which to aim, and that was Mafeking.

Baden-Powell had been into Rhodesia, but he was back—that tireless man!—on the 2nd, and the town felt cheerful. The natives came to him and asked to be allowed to fight against their enemies and the enemies of the Englishman; but "B.-P." refused to permit this, and restricted them to the defence—and the defence only—of their own quarter of the town. As these natives were pretty well armed with modern firearms, they formed, for purely defensive purposes, a considerable addition to the forces at the commander's disposal—numbering, as they did, at least 500. Meanwhile Baden-Powell scoured the country with his scouts, and telegraphed to Cape Town and Kimberley for more guns and ammunition. Somehow the dashing colonel was able to make himself receive attention, and he had no cause to complain of paucity either of guns, rifles, or ammunition. He laid down more mine-fields—of cordite and dynamite—a kind of "man-traps and spring-guns" for trespassers; and, in short, used his few last days with energy.

So that when war broke out on the 11th, Mafeking was ready for all comers—"bread for our friends, lead for our foes," and plenty of both. They had need of every ounce, that plucky garrison. For war had not been declared much more than twelve hours before the enemy began operations by cutting the telegraph wires running south, and they started also to tear up the railway line. The next day they did the like to the north, so that the only way now for Mafeking to communicate with the outer world was by employing hardy blacks to run to Kuruman—and ere long this point of communication was cut off also.

It was at Mafeking, or, rather, in connection with the beleaguering of Mafeking, that occurred the first really exciting incident in the war. It was known at the time as "the wrecking of the armoured train." In response to one of Baden-Powell's demands, the authorities at the Cape had sent a supply of ammunition and two big guns to Mafeking. The train containing them, which consisted of an



IN THE TRENCHES AT MAFEKING.

armoured carriage and a truck, arrived safely at Vryburg on the 11th. A pilot engine was attached to the train, and this was driven by an engine-driver named Flowerday.

All went well until the Maribogo station was reached. At this point, a Protectorate policeman informed Lieutenant Nesbitt, who was in charge of the train, that the Boers held the line to the north, and advised him not to go any further. The lieutenant replied that he had been sent to Mafeking, and to Mafeking he would go. Anyhow, he would try. The party for the defence of the train, a detachment of fifteen men of the Protectorate regiment, were just as willing to take the risk as their young commander. You must know that Lieutenant Nesbitt was one of those entitled to wear that bit of gun-metal called the V.C. Flowerday, the engine-driver, a resolute, plucky fellow, was also not in the least averse to an attempt to run the gauntlet.

"It is far more important that Mafeking should have these guns and lyddite shells," said Nesbitt, "than that we should return in safety." He resolved, that is, with his eyes wide open, to take all risks. "Right you are, sir!" said Flowerday, and he clapped on steam. "You'd better push on a little ahead," the Lieutenant said to Flowerday, "and signal to me if there is anything wrong. And you'd better take the ammunition truck, so that, if necessary, you can leave us, and bolt for Mafeking with it."

KURUMAN: PART OF THE CAMP.

Flowerday forged ahead. It was night, and nothing could be seen of the state of the line. However, all went well until Kraaipan was reached—a point on the line only some forty miles south of Mafeking.

Then the trouble began. The engine-driver's first notice of it was when he felt his engine leave the rails. He at once signalled to his officer that something was wrong, and Nesbitt clapped the brake on the armoured carriage and called a halt.

"Yes, we're blocked! What is it?" A hasty examination is made. "A couple of rails torn up, sir." "We *must* get through if it's possible. Can we replace the rails, do you think?" "We might try, sir." And try they did, and managed to lay the rails in place again—not, you understand, so firmly as to bear the "Flying Scotsman," but just enough to carry the little load, the useful little load, to their countrymen in need.

VIEW IN KURUMAN.

All this time no sign of Boers. It was still black night, so nothing could be seen except by the light of lanterns. So far so good. "The permanent way is restored; now let us clear away the wreckage and be off." Easier said than done, most gallant Lieutenant Nesbitt. The engine carried a jack, which is an apparatus for raising heavy weights short distances.*

* A jack is a thick column of iron, with a screw on the top. If an engine has to be lifted, the pillar is put underneath and the screw turned, thus lifting the engine.

They strained and heaved, but the engine was heavy, the water in the tank being alone sufficient to make it ponderous. For half an hour or more they had been labouring thus, when suddenly the crack of a rifle was heard. Pphtt! A bullet flattened itself on the armoured truck!

The enemy had seen the lights, and were firing. All night long they continued to blaze away, and splinters of lead flew about in all directions, wounding several of the police and also the driver. The engine was not armoured, and soon the water was running from her tank out of holes made by the bullets. Fortunately, one effect of this was to make the task of putting her on the rails considerably lighter, and the work went on steadily.

At last dawn broke, and the little band of British could see that the enemy numbered about a hundred, and were ensconced in a sluit, or ditch, close by. The firing was not all on one side now, for the

armoured carriage was loopholed, and afforded excellent cover for riflemen. In fact, the little band was by no means having the worst of it, when a booming sound was heard, and buzz! as of some thousands of hiving bees, a 40-pound shell dropped near the engine. Even now the armoured carriage might have escaped back to Maribogo and Vryburg, but Nesbitt would not hear of it.

For an hour or two the unequal fight continued—Nesbitt hoping that the firing would be heard by some police patrol and relief sent, so that he could run his precious cargo through to Mafeking. At last, when the engine had been battered out of all recognition, a white flag was hoisted, and the plucky handful surrendered. The first prisoners! Nesbitt, by this time wounded, and his men were taken off to Lichtenburg; nor were they treated with anything but kindness on the way.

The only one to get off was Flowerday

SCOUTS.

As soon as the white flag was hoisted, that resolute railwayman, not being, as he said, "particularly anxious" to be made a prisoner, slid off the truck on the side farthest from the enemy. Then he crawled off on his belly for a few hundred yards in the gutter along the side of the line. He heard the Boers galloping up to receive the surrender, and, knowing that a moving

object would be likely to catch the eye of one of them, he laid quite still, first covering himself with some sand.

This is like the trick resorted to by some birds and animals—to select some object of their own colour and lie close to it. The Boers did not see him, and finding them busy about the prisoners and the booty, Flowerday hastened to put distance between himself and them. His haste was slow, for he had to crawl and creep along the gutter for a mile and a half. Then he laid down again—covered with sand as before—and had two or three hours' sleep, after which he rose and continued his journey, reaching Maribogo hungry, bruised, and wounded, but free.

The Boers lost two killed and several wounded in this affair, in which, though the success was to the enemy, much credit was due to the vanquished for their brave resistance against overwhelming odds.

Mafeking was now (October 12) cut off; but, as yet, there was no sign of an attack upon the place itself. Indeed, the first encounter was rather sought by the defenders than by the invaders. And a very curious encounter it was—one of those incidents showing the wiliness and resourcefulness of Colonel Baden-Powell, and extremely to the credit of one Perry. It was the first thing to proclaim to the Boers the kind of man they had to deal with; and a sharp lesson it was.

There were in the yard of the railway station a couple of truck-loads of dynamite. And it seemed to B.-P. that "the town would be safer without them"; for a blow from a shell or bullet might come at any time, and then the whole stock would explode. Dynamite is a very powerful explosive, and such a quantity as this would have a very large destructive circle—large enough to almost wreck the town.

Wherefore, the commander of the garrison "concluded," as they say in America, that he would let the Boers have that dynamite to play with. So he asked for an engine-driver; and a man named Perry offered himself. His orders were simple. He was to run the trucks out for a few miles, and then set them loose. Perry set out at once, and steamed slowly for more than two miles without incident. Then he came across a large party of the enemy, who were advancing on Mafeking. "No earthly use me staying here," said Perry; and he uncoupled the trucks, sent them slowly down the line, while he turned his engine northward and headed for home.

The Boers thought they had intercepted an armoured train, and at once began to close on their prey. When within easy range, they opened fire with their rifles. One result was to shake the whole line for several miles—so much so that Perry, now a mile and a half away with his engine, thought he was going to be thrown off the line. The other result was more painful—to the Boers at any rate. I do not know if they realised what had happened; but in a moment maimed and mangled Dutchmen strewed the field. Some filled the earth with their groans; others would groan never more.

Thus Baden-Powell turned to the annoyance of the enemy something which might have been his own destruction. The burghers sent their wounded to Pretoria. Perry came back and told the tale to a delighted audience.

That night a force of 3,500 Transvaalers were taking up their positions round Mafeking; and the next morning showed them in force. But B.-P. had scored the first trick.

And what about Kimberley? Kimberley, the diamond city—the city of the great

capitalist De Beers Company—the city of Cecil Rhodes the Empire builder, whom every Boer believed to be at the bottom of all this trouble. Stands Kimberley where it did?

The diamond city, situate on the western border of the Free State—right on the border—was important from many points of view.

Strategically, it formed the same convenient kind of jumping-off place into the Free State as Mafeking did into the Transvaal at the time of the ill-fortuned Jameson Raid, being only about ninety miles from Bloemfontein, the Free State capital, and being served by rail from Cape Town *viâ* De Aar Junction, whence the rail also branched off in a south-easterly direction, *viâ* Naaupoort, to the town of Port Elizabeth.

Kimberley was most important on account of its enormous wealth. It held diamonds. The De Beers mine, the Du Toits mine, the Bultfontein mine, the Wesselton mine—all holes in the ground where was the precious blue clay, and in it the shiny pebbles that had made Cecil Rhodes rich. Ah! that *verdomd* Cecil Rhodes, how they hated him!

Kimberley was most important of all, because it held Cecil Rhodes. That extraordinary man had, just before war broke

THE RIGHT HON. CECIL RHODES.
(Photo: J. Gribble, Paarl.)

out, proved himself to be more than a mere vulgar millionaire by bolting from Cape Town to Kimberley, declaring his intention of remaining there so long as the siege lasted. "Danger!" said he, with a contempt that lashed the Boers like whips—"Danger! Kimberley is as safe as Piccadilly!"

The Boers swore by all their gods they would have Cecil Rhodes. They would hang him high as Haman! They would take him in a cage to Bloemfontein! Ruthless destroyer of the peace of South Africa! Greedy capitalist, who would if he could take their land for the sake of its wealth! Organiser of the infamous Raid! Breaker of the law of nations! Woe betide Cecil Rhodes if those lanky, brown-faced, straggle-bearded farmers should catch him!

But Cecil Rhodes drove about Kimberley and laughed contemptuously. He knew well that he was a lightning-conductor; that his presence in the city of precious stones would draw round the place a large body of the enemy. He knew that Kimberley could make a stout resistance; and he hoped to draw off so many Boers on the errand of capturing himself that the way into the Free State would be left open to the British generals.

Kimberley was in a better condition to resist a siege than were the other towns on that western border. In September, Colonel Kekewich, of the 1st Loyal North Lancashires, had been sent out to put the place in a defensible state. He had with him, of regular troops, four companies* of infantry (the Loyal North Lancashires, 1st Battalion) with machine guns. He had also some pretty effective artillery—a battery of garrison artillery,* with six mountain guns† and about 200 men, and two field batteries.‡ He had also a large party of Royal Engineers and some companies of the Royal Army Medical Corps, with a hospital.

The regulars, however, were not the only fighting force available. Kimberley was a British—as distinguished from a Dutch—town. It was a mining—as distinguished from an agricultural—community, and it may be taken that the miners in South Africa, as a rule, are British, while most of the Dutch are agricultural. Indeed, the word "Boer" means "a farmer." Kimberley was willing to do something for itself. It possessed a corps of volunteers, and many of the townsfolk had some idea which was the right end of a rifle. All these entered heartily into the commander's plans for the defence of the town.

The time was very short, and it is doubtful how far Colonel Kekewich would have succeeded in making the town a fortress had it not been for two things. One was the presence of enormous mounds of earth, the clay dug up from the diamond mines; the other was the presence of some 14,000 Kaffirs, workers in the same wealthy holes. It should be stated that the mines belonged to the De Beers Company; that Kimberley practically belonged to the same wealthy corporation; and that Mr. Cecil Rhodes was, to all intents and purposes, the De Beers Company.

So the 14,000 Kaffirs were set to work, shifting the great mounds of earth; and in

* A company of infantry, we may repeat, is 101 men, 10 non-commissioned officers, and 3 commissioned officers. This is "full strength"; but a company is rarely at full strength.

* Garrison artillery consists of heavy guns, chiefly not intended to be moved about, but for the defence of fortified places.

† Mountain guns have considerably less weight of metal than field batteries. The gunners, instead of carrying swords like field gunners, carry cutlasses.

‡ For field battery, see p. 2.

MEN OF THE NAVAL BRIGADE MOVING A GUN

a few weeks Colonel Kekewich had vastly strengthened the town with earthworks. Then he ran a little railway round it, that he might send out excursion parties on armoured trains. His officers took the volunteers in hand and soon put a little polish on. And by the time war broke out Kimberley felt on very good terms with itself. As one of the defenders put it, "Nothing but famine could reduce Kimberley." And by way of staving off that calamity as long as possible, the commander of the garrison put every man on rations—not more than a pound of meat a day. Hardly starvation allowance yet.

A large force of Boers assembled at Boshof, whence they marched to the Modder River, the first river south of Kimberley. Here the railway crossed by a fine bridge, and it was at this point the Boers resolved to cut off communication, for the river was deep, and not easily fordable in face of a force holding the bank. So they destroyed the bridge at Modder River on the 12th of October, and marched on the 16th to Spytfontein. In the meantime another Boer party, under Commandant Botha, marched on the city by way of Riverton.

Colonel Kekewich was not by any means the kind of man to let the enemy work their will uninterrupted. So on the 16th he sent out an armoured train to reconnoitre to the south, on the line towards the Modder River. Cautiously it made its way down as far as Spytfontein, and there came across the party of burghers whom I mentioned as having reached that place. The burghers saw them, too, and proceeded to give them a warm welcome. Shells began to hum over the train ; rifle fire also opened on it. But the mark was not a very good one ; for Lieutenant Webster, of the Loyal North Lancashires, who commanded the expedition, kept his train moving up and down the line, now fast, now slow. Thus it came to pass that not a single shell reached its mark ; and the musketry must have been a little wild, seeing that out of some hundreds of bullets only three hit the train. And the sides of an armoured train are bullet proof.

The handful of Lancashire lads who composed the crew of this dry land gunboat had a Maxim on board ; and as they moved up and down the line they turned the handle thereof with some effect. They also manned the loopholes, and took pot-shots at such Dutchmen as showed themselves. Not without effect. Seven Boers were hit—two, at least, mortally. Then Lieutenant Webster returned to Kimberley with the news that a considerable party of the enemy, with artillery, was as near as Spytfontein on the south. Colonel Kekewich knew that another was at Riverton, fifteen miles to the north.

Kimberley, like Mafeking, was now practically cut off ; and the garrison settled down strictly to business. On the 19th a small raiding party of the enemy rode cannily from Riverton and tried to raid the intermediate reservoir from which the town reservoir was supplied. They were seen, however, and a few police went out to meet them, on which they fled at a great rate.

For two or three days things were very quiet—indeed, quite dull. Therefore, to keep his men in spirits, and by way of finding out the strength of the enemy and what he might be doing, the commander of the garrison resolved upon another sortie. This time he went to the north, where the last heard of the Boers was that they had occupied Riverton. Before daybreak, Major Turner set out on the north road, with 270 men, all mounted. The little party had to be particularly careful,

and so scouts were sent out to feel the way.

If we were asked to find a good expression to characterise scouting, we should use that of "feeling the way." Imagine yourself on a dark night in a place of which you know little, except that you do know it to be dangerous. Would you not cautiously put out your foot and feel the ground, in order that you might not stumble over a stone, or walk into space?

Practically speaking, that is what the leader of an armed party has to do in a country infested by the enemy. He does not ride boldly on with his men in a body. If he did, he might on turning a bend in the road, or passing over the brow of a hill, suddenly find himself confronted by the muzzle of a gun or a deadly row of loaded rifles. If he be wise, therefore, he will send out a couple of men to the right forward and another couple to the left forward, and three or four couples straight in front, to search the ground—to climb hills and bits of rising ground commanding a good view of the country ahead. Major Turner advanced in this way somewhere about ten miles, and arrived safe at a point within five miles of the Boer position at Riverton.

This point was Macfarlane's Farm—a name to be remembered. For here took place one of the most brilliant skirmishes in the war.

It was nine o'clock when Macfarlane's Farm was reached; and here the men breakfasted with hearty appetite and gave their mounts a rest. Pretty soon they saw to the north and east of them a party of the enemy, riding in loose and scattered array. They, too, were scouting, but had not seen anything. "Keep close, men! Take all the cover you can get, and we'll surprise them." Nearer and nearer drew the party; but now it was obvious that they were suspicious. "Fire!" And 250 rifles startled the stillness of the veldt. Two Boers dropped from their horses. The rest, coolly enough, be it said, galloped at full speed to a sandheap on the right; and pretty soon the spit of the Mauser was replying to the crack of the Lee-Metford.

Before long Scott Turner found himself with about 700 Mausers replying to his 270 Lee-Metfords. Well was it for him that his comrades in Kimberley began to get uneasy. At ten o'clock an armoured train with ammunition was sent out. An hour later 150 men of the Loyal North Lancashires* went in a second train, and at noon Major Murray set out for the fray with a couple of Maxims, two field guns, and seventy men of the irregular forces of mounted infantry; so that by about two o'clock in the afternoon the blazing sun shone down on some 500 Britishers fiercely pelting one and a half times their number of stubborn Dutchmen. An hour later a second armoured train arrived with more ammunition.

The Boers had been having the worst of it. When Murray's mounted men hove in sight, a party of the enemy had moved to cut them off—that is, to prevent them joining Major Scott Turner. But that dashing officer made a counter-move upon the flank of the cutting-off party. He advances on their flank, when suddenly a hot fire sweeps his line—the wily enemy have anticipated his move, and have posted behind a stone wall some 150 rifles.

The issue hangs in the balance. Murray sees the position, and instantly one of his guns unlimbers, and a hot fire of shell astonishes the foe. They fall. They retire to the security of the kopjes.

* This is the only regiment entitled to the prefix "Loyal." And right proud of it they are.

Now, loyal lads of Lancashire! Think you that you can clear those kopjes? These fellows are good enough at a thousand yards—let's try them at six feet. Advance! Steady! Don't expose yourself too much.

Now! Lie down for a few minutes and take breath. It is only 400 yards to the top. Fix—bayonets! Charge! In a long line, with spaces of ten or twelve yards between each man, the British troops rush up the hill. The Boers give way! Their firing becomes wilder and still more wild. We are in amongst them. A fierce cheer, more like a growl than anything else. Thrust and stab! But few wait the onset.

Forward! again. And from hill to hill the little band rushes. Ah! they can't stand the cold steel. What's that? The Boers have lost their leader, so the word goes round.* The Boers retire—sullenly, doggedly, firing as they go; and carrying their dead and wounded with them. They are a tough lot, these Free Staters and these rebels—for the commando includes some Cape Dutchmen; but we have made them feel the lion's claws.

OLD COMRADES: RESERVISTS REJOINING THE RANKS.

Cheerfully the 500 return to camp—not quite the 500, though. For three men will never face the foe again, and twenty-one more have bullet wounds. Still, even the wounded are cheerful.

A few days later and the Boers have closed round the city.

* This turned out to be a false report. He was wounded, but not mortally.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ARMING OF BRITAIN.

WHILE these things were going on, while the Boers were massing on the frontiers and marching into Natal, Britain was making ready.

The Transvaal Government having on September 2nd withdrawn its proposals for the settlement of the points in dispute, the British Government, by way of emphasising the fact that they were in earnest, at a Cabinet Council held on September 8th decided to order 10,000 troops from India and home to proceed to Natal for the protection of British interests.

Still hoping to preserve peace, preparations were made for the eventualities of war.

Events moved rapidly, and on October 4th the President of the Orange Free State declared that in the event of war his State would help the Transvaal. On the 7th the Queen issued a Proclamation calling out the Reserves, and on the same day Parliament was summoned to meet on the 17th.

The Reserves are of two kinds. There are old soldiers who have served less than twelve years in the army, and are bound, after leaving the service, to make up the twelve years with the colours if called upon. Then there are others, called the Special Reserve, who join the army for a day and then go into the Reserve at once for twelve years. The ordinary Reserve is divided into First and Second Classes. The First consists of those I have mentioned above, the Second consists of men who have served full time and are in receipt of pensions. And it is the law that if the Queen calls out any part of the Reserves during a prorogation, she must summon Parliament to meet within ten days thereafter.

Even now there were men of light and leading who hazarded the opinion that the horrors of war might be averted by careful and skilful diplomacy. Memorials on behalf of peace were extensively signed, and meetings convened in various parts of the country. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, speaking at Maidstone on the 6th, regarded the situation as "far from hopeless."

But from day to day it was evident that the country was being roused. Most of the meetings called to protest against the action of the Government were abandoned or broken up—notably at Norwich and Newcastle and various parts of London.

At Liverpool a most remarkable incident occurred. The "Transvaal Committee" were anxious to have a town's meeting to discuss the situation, and to this end invited from the ministers of religion in the neighbourhood of Liverpool an expression of their attitude upon the question. The replies were so hostile to the views of the Committee that, though they attended as a deputation to ask the Lord Mayor to convene the meeting, their chief spokesman did not feel justified in pressing for it. The Lord Mayor, expressing the opinion that at this stage of the negotiations demonstrative utterances were out of place, accordingly decided that he would not call the meeting. But matters were soon brought to a crisis.

At 6.45 on the morning of the 10th of October, the Colonial Office received an

ultimatum of a most peremptory character The Transvaal Government informed Her Majesty's Government that in default of the receipt of satisfactory assurances in relation to four formulated demands not later than 5 p.m. on the 11th—16¼ hours from the receipt of the document in London—they would regard the default as a Declaration of War. These four demands were as follows :—

"(*a*) That all points of mutual difference shall be regulated by the friendly course of arbitration or by whatever amicable way may be agreed upon by this Government with her Majesty's Government.

"(*b*) That the troops on the borders of this Republic shall be instantly withdrawn.

"(*c*) That all reinforcements of troops which have arrived in South Africa since the 1st June, 1899, shall be removed from South Africa within a reasonable time, to be agreed upon with this Government. . . .

"(*d*) That her Majesty's troops which are now on the high seas shall not be landed in any port of South Africa."

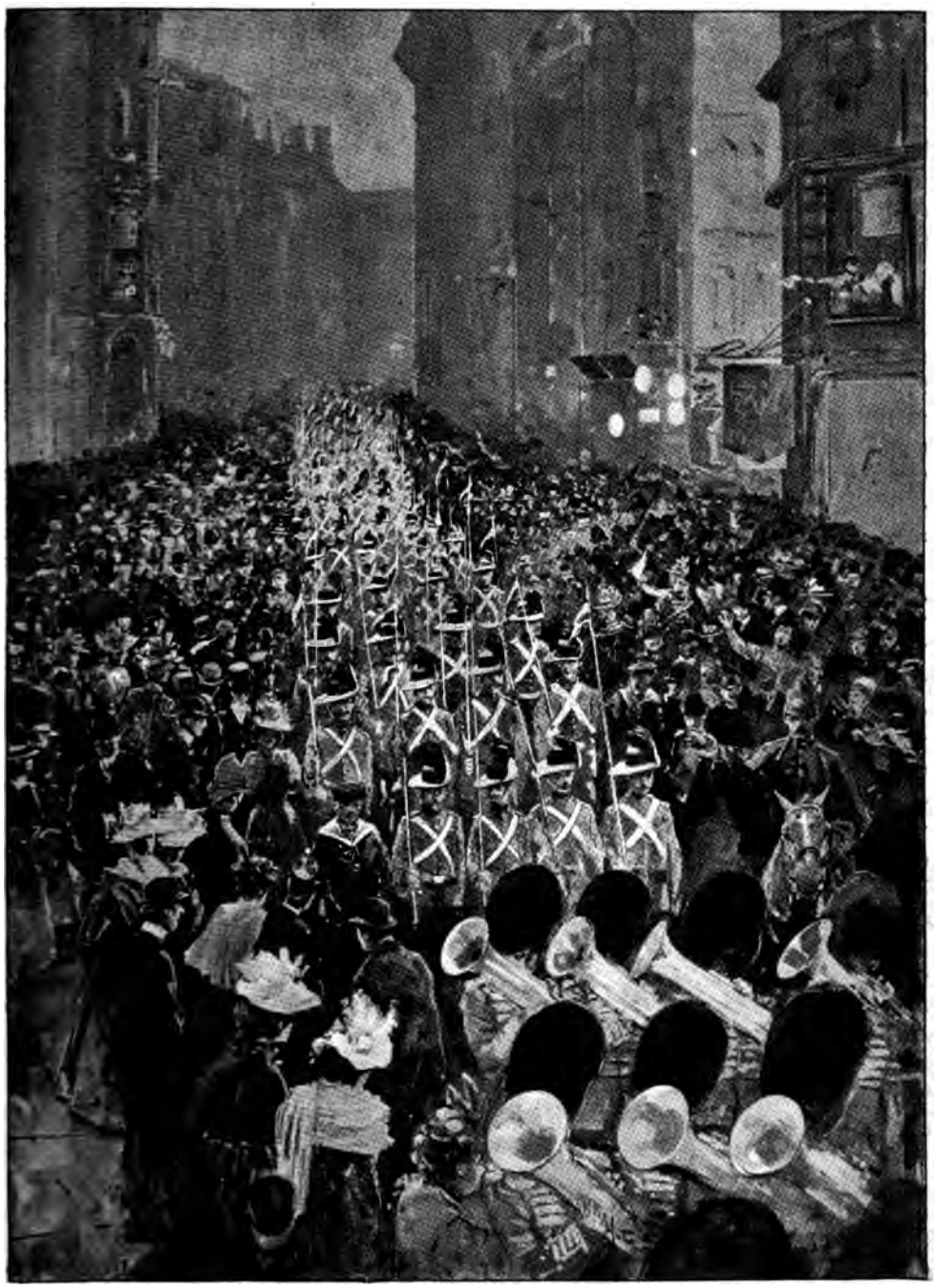
The ultimatum was for a few hours the topic of incredulous hilarity. As you walked along the streets or rode in train or tram, you heard on every hand such ejaculations as "Cheek," "Bluff," "Wiped out." The British working man seemed to regard the document as a huge joke. This phase of the question quickly subsided. And the manner in which the prince, and peer, and peasant, the classes and the masses, became one solid phalanx is a thing to be remembered.

How the news spread! No longer was it requisite to spread information by post-boy couriers or by lighting beacons on the hill-tops. But just as surely, and far more rapidly, it spread, as in the days of the Spanish Armada, when "With loose rein and bloody spurs, rode inland many a post," and when "Swift to east and swift to west the ghastly war-flame spread"; when the foeman saw "along each southern shire, Cape beyond cape, in endless range, those twinkling balls of fire."

The news was carried by the telegraph from end to end of our tight little island, and the thrill of sympathetic feeling aroused was almost as rapid as the electric current that dropped the message here, there, and everywhere.

Not only in Great Britain itself, but throughout Greater Britain, in every colony and dependency of the Empire, there was the same manifestation of "the union of hearts." The cable message and the patriotic response were simultaneous. The 16½ hours were quite long enough to elicit a reply unparalleled in the history of nations—a reply direct and emphatic, as to whose meaning there could be no mistake.

There was no longer any doubt as to the action to be taken. All questions of policy and politics slipped into the background. If these were mentioned, they were only alluded to in a casual way as academic questions that might or might not be discussed at some future day. The British nation fell into line and closed its ranks, and set its teeth as if it meant business. Tales began to come through of the sufferings of British refugees fleeing from the Rand. The man in the street had no qualms of conscience now as to fighting the Boers. The Republics had themselves thrown down the gauntlet. Equally, he had no doubt as to the result. To smash the enemy and settle the details of the fruits of conquest at Pretoria were foregone conclusions. The necessary expedition to



THE NEW SOUTH WALES LANCERS LEAVING LONDON.

the Transvaal was by many regarded in the light of a pleasant little picnic—a trip there and back again, with probably a skirmish or two by way of diversion.

But there were men in authority who knew that the settling of the issue would be something more than a pleasure trip, and that whether the encounter were long or short, it would need to be stiff and decisive.

Without further delay Britain began in dead earnest to arm.

It was no more a question of a "word," or a matter of plunder—the integrity of the Empire was at stake; and when it had become a question as to the supremacy of the British flag there was a practical unanimity in Great Britain and among her sons and brothers and cousins across the seas that this was a matter to be seen through.

This unanimity was strikingly shown when Parliament assembled on October 17th. Mr. Balfour's summons to the members of his party, dated October 8th, stated that—"The position of affairs in South Africa has rendered it necessary to summon Parliament together on the 17th. Matters of the gravest public moment will be immediately discussed." The Queen's Speech referred to the question of the hour in the following terms:—

"Within a very brief period after the recent prorogation I am compelled by events deeply affecting the interests of my Empire to recur to your advice and aid. The state of affairs in South Africa has made it expedient that my Government should be enabled to strengthen the military forces of this country by calling out the Reserve. For this purpose the provisions of the law render it necessary that Parliament should be called together.

"Except for the difficulties that have been caused by the action of the South African Republic the condition of the world continues to be peaceful."

By this time the Boers were over the frontier in Natal, and had occupied Charleston and Newcastle.

In the Lords there was absolute unanimity. The Earl of Kimberley, leader of the Opposition, took the earliest possible opportunity of putting patriotism before party. He declared that those with whom he acted were as ready as the supporters of Her Majesty's Government to give their support to whatever measures were necessary to vindicate the honour and support the interests of the country. He declared amid approving cheers that no nation could receive such an ultimatum as that which the South African Republic had addressed to Great Britain without at once showing that it meant to defend its territories and its interests.

In the Commons the leader of the Opposition, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, at once made it evident that he belonged to Her Majesty's Opposition, and not to a mere faction. In measured words he declared that the ultimatum made demands and was couched in language that made it absolutely impossible for any self-respecting country even to consider. Calling attention to the fact that British territory had been invaded, he urged that it was the plain duty of Ministers, Parliament, and people to resist. He would be no party to placing any obstacle in the way of granting the necessary supplies and powers.

An amendment to the "Address," moved by Mr. Dillon on behalf of the Nationalist Party, declaring that the action of the British Government was the cause of the war, and recommending that the questions at issue be referred to arbitration, received but fifty-four votes.

Of these forty were given by Nationalist members, and Mr. Labouchere was the only English member who spoke in its support.

A further amendment, censuring the diplomacy of the Government, moved by Mr. Philip Stanhope, was defeated by 362 to 135 votes, giving the Government the substantial majority of 227. The division was remarkable for the fact that the Government were supported in the division lobby by three members of the late Government. The chief leaders of the official Opposition did not vote.

The proposal to call up the Militia and the Militia Reserves was agreed to by 299 to 36. The supplementary estimate for 35,000 additional men was agreed to by 200 to 35. The sum of £10,000,000 towards the cost of the war was voted by 271 to 32; and several subsequent resolutions relating to the men and money required for the war were carried by even larger majorities. The minority consisted of Irish Nationalists.

Parliament was prorogued on October 28th, having practically given the Government a free hand in prosecuting the war with all energy. The Session closed with the Queen's Prayer, in the concluding paragraph of the usual Speech: "I trust that the divine blessing may rest upon your efforts and those of my gallant army to restore peace and good government to that portion of my Empire, and to vindicate the honour of this country." And all the people said "Amen." For the war was not a war of rulers, it was the war of a people jealous of their country's honour, and prizing both peace and good government for all people.

We have spoken of the thrill of feeling that was brought into existence by the ultimatum.

Let us retrace our steps for a little while to note the course of events from the time when the Cabinet decided to increase the garrison of Natal by 10,000 men.

The troops ordered from India included a brigade of cavalry (the 5th Dragoons, the 9th Lancers, and the 19th Hussars), a brigade of infantry (the 2nd Devonshire regiment, with battalions from the Gloucestershires, the King's Royal Rifles, and the Gordons), and a brigade division of artillery, consisting of three batteries; together with several sections of the British Field Hospital. These troops began to leave India on the 15th, and the entire force was ordered to be *en route* not later than the 25th of September. The Royal Irish Fusiliers were drafted from Egypt, and the 1st Border Regiment from Crete.

At home, the first battalion placed under immediate orders for South Africa was the 1st Battalion Northumberland Fusiliers, stationed at Aldershot. With great rapidity the 2nd Battalion of the same regiment, with batteries of the Royal Horse Artillery and companies of the Army Service Corps, were similarly honoured; and the 1st Battalion of the Gordons were ordered to join their comrades of the 2nd Battalion from India.

Sir George White was appointed to the command of the division, which at full strength, and including the troops already in Natal, would amount to 15,000 men. These announcements of orders and appointments fairly set the ball rolling. Preparations for the despatch of the troops, together with the necessary supplies of horses, ammunition, guns, food, and hospital appliances were pushed on vigorously. War was seen to be inevitable, or at the least most highly probable, and the various Government departments worked at high pressure.

Towards the close of September an

ominous order was given to send out the greater part of the Army Service Corps. This meant that the Government was determined to have no repetition of the huge blunders of the Crimea War in relation to the transport service; and the *Times* and other papers emphasised the necessity of calling up the reserves of the corps.

command of Sir Redvers Buller, was to the present generation of Britons a novelty, and something more. Nearly half a century had elapsed since the country had engaged in a great war. And those who knew the temper of our foe and the nature of the country which was to be the scene of action, predicted that, unless we were to

HOISTING HORSES ON BOARD A TRANSPORT.
(Photo: Stephen Cribb, Southsea.)

But those responsible for affairs were determined to have, if possible, an efficient army, and an efficient transport service and commissariat. However, the proportion of men rejected in the companies of the Service Corps who were to sail early in October was only one to a company, and this was about the average in the corps.

The work of mobilisation was watched with the keenest interest. This First Army Corps, which was placed under the

repeat the mistakes of the campaign in the Crimea, we should need to make preparations on an unprecedently extensive scale. In that war men died while the materials that would have saved them spoiled and rotted a few miles away.

The Army Corps was to number upwards of 50,000 troops, in addition to those already in South Africa, viz.: 5,534 cavalry, 29,253 infantry, 9,397 on the lines of communication, and 5,122 of the Transport

Corps. Due orders were given for the attachment to the various divisions of horse, batteries and ammunition columns, supply columns, field hospitals, and bearers. There were also provided various troops having charge of pontoons, telegraphs, balloons, railways, etc. etc.

Clear intructions were given at Aldershot, and Woolwich, and Portsmouth, and other camps and ports, for the various items of preparation for which each of those centres was responsible. The orders for this mobilisation of the army for South Africa, with a list of staff and other officers, were all published by the War Office on the day of the Royal Proclamation—and the work began in good earnest. The War Department—so freely criticised, and so lavishly advised by amateur strategists and noisy, inglorious Wellingtons, determined not to waste their wisdom or to hide their talents under bushels or barrels —was on its mettle to an extent unheard and undreamt of by the men of this generation.

It seemed at first as if all the machinery had been newly repaired and oiled. Things seemed to work with unparalleled smoothness. And the country was willing to pay for good food and proper clothing, and sufficient medicine and nursing for the brave fellows who were to fight her battles. John Bull and his brother Sandy are sometimes inclined to

TROOPS' QUARTERS ON THE *BRAEMAR CASTLE*. TABLES LAID FOR THE MEN.
(Photo: Milner, Wandsworth Bridge Road, S.W. By kind permission of Messrs. Donald Currie & Co.)

grumble at the huge demands upon their joint purse—but they never begrudge the cost of defending their honour or their interests, or the claims of justice and humanity.

We were "in for it," and had made up our minds to see it through at all costs—and those unable to go to the front were willing to pay the travelling and other expenses of younger and stronger men.

Two days before the despatch of the Boer ultimatum, the Reservists were called out—and right gallantly they came in. The first batch consisted of some 25,000 men belonging to the various regiments already in South Africa, or getting ready for it. Never was a more cheerful and prompt response to a royal proclamation. The Reservists came in from east and west and north and south at their country's call. Many of them had married since they left the service—most of them were busily employed in good situations and had comfortable homes. But they were all of one accord. The groom and the gentleman, the navvy and the artisan, the shopkeeper and the farm labourer, were all called. And they all answered. Men of every trade and craft, of every social position and of every temperament—all answered to the call of Queen and country. From every county and city—from every town and village—there was a loyal response. The miners and iron-workers of Northumberland and Durham, the dalesmen of Cumberland and Westmorland, the busy lads of Lancashire, the hearty sons of the county of broad acres, the sturdy men of the Midlands, the ever ready citizens of London, the tillers of the soil and dwellers by the sea, the grimy boys of the Potteries, and the stalwart descendants of Drake's and Raleigh's crews, were all of one mind.

And the men of gallant little Wales were true to the traditions of the Men of Harlech. From their homes in the Gower, and the Swansea valley, the vales of Neath and Llangollen and Rymney, from the hills where ancient heroes had stood valiantly for freedom, from Cardiff and Glamorgan, from Brecon and Cardigan and Carnarvon, from lovely spots on the sea-shore and sequestered nooks in hills and dales and dells, Taffy trooped forth.

And the fighting Irish—despite the efforts of partisans blinded by political passion—from Ulster and Munster, from Connaught and Leinster, they came. When was Pat ever backward at a fight?

And from north of the Border they came in gallant style—citizens of Edinburgh and Glasgow, Paisley bodies, and the men of Hawick and Galashiels, Melrose and Dumfries, and the lang toon of Kirkcaldy, and the lads of the Granite City, and Fair Perth, and Bonnie Dundee. And the clans—Gordons and Campbells, and Macgregors, Macphersons and Frasers, and the dwellers by loch and ben, of every tartan—all flocked to the standard. The highlanders and the islanders of Bute and the Land of Lorne—with their far awa' cousins from Islay and Argyle and Skye. A fighting race, these Macs.

All sorts and conditions of men stood shoulder to shoulder, and proved beyond dispute that they were the children of their fathers, as ready to do and, if need be, die as were the men whose brave deeds won freedom and renown for dwellers in "the land which freemen till: Which sober suited freedom chose." Varied as they were in temper, in training, and in position, the call of the Queen was answered almost before it was given.

There were, of course, many cases of hardship, many that roused the sympathies

of near friends and neighbours—of young men newly married ; of men whose wives were ill, or expecting shortly to become mothers ; of men watching by the death-beds of their parents ; of men who had just invested their little all in the purchase of a business ; of men whose liability to serve with the colours was on the eve of

THE DUKE OF CONNAUGHT HOISTING THE QUEEN'S FLAG ON THE *MAINE*.

expiration. But, let it be said to their everlasting credit, there were no traitors, no waverers.

The time fixed for the Reserves to come in was prior to the 17th of October. And from the day following the call, at all the railway stations you might see little groups parting with those near and dear to them who were on the way to join their old regiments—tears and smiles, sobs and good wishes, were mingled to the brave hearts who never might return. And they travelled from the hills of Craven to Canterbury, from the smoke of Sheffield to Aldershot, and from fields and forges and factories, and from counters and counting-houses, from pits and quarries, to join their respective depôts. Some were hilariously jovial, as if the expedition was a mere joke. Others, as you travelled in the train with them, looked very serious. But it was not from cowardice or disinclination to do their part manfully; and you felt that in the day of battle these quiet, serious men would give a good account of themselves.

It was wonderful in those early mobilisation days to travel by rail. At every station men joined the train—men in civilian clothes, but of soldierly bearing. Their friends accompanied them. "Good-bye, Jack! A pleasant journey to Pretoria!" "Good luck to you, boy! Don't forget to rub it well in!" And, at the last, pale-faced, red-eyed women held up babies to be kissed; and, as the train moved off, these sobbed a little. But the multitude cheered, and sang "Rule Britannia." And all along the route there were cheerings and waving of handkerchiefs for the men going out to vindicate the supremacy of Britain.

Very inspiring and very loyal were some of the send-offs; and in the larger towns, where the reservists were numerous, great demonstrations. Mayors and magistrates, provosts and bailies, lords-lieutenant, and sheriffs vied with the families and comrades of the men in wishing them well. The public took great interest in the men of military bearing and civilian dress entering the various places of rendezvous—most of them decently dressed, some of them in the dress of well-to-do people, and some in shabby attire, but all meaning business. And as the various returns appeared, showing how punctually the men turned up, it was seen that nearly every man was accounted for. There were a few gazetted as deserters, nearly all of whom gave themselves up. In more than one case it was found that men had "deserted" to Natal to try to get a place in a regiment of colonial irregulars. And there was one reservist who, being out of the country when the call to arms came, hurried over, and, finding his regiment gone, paid his own passage out to the Cape, and joined the colours there.

If there is one thing that a British soldier hates more than anything else, it is losing the chance of a fight. He would rather lose his stripes, or have his pay stopped, or be prohibited from entering the canteen, or even have his leave stopped, than be left at home when his comrades are being sent to the front. And so it came to pass that many men deserted, and when brought to book therefor, indignantly maintained that if they were not fit to fight they would be better out of the army.

The First Army Corps having been mobilised, they started for the front. When it was seen that a whole army corps must be sent, Sir Redvers Buller was appointed to the chief command. General Buller set out from Southampton

on October 14th, the very day the Boers entered Newcastle. It was on Saturday afternoon, and huge crowds filled the roads and approaches to Waterloo Station (a name of happy omen) to cheer the gallant V.C. At the station was a distinguished company of notables, among whom was His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales.

The parting words of His Royal Highness, as the train moved off, "Good-bye again, Buller! Good luck to you!" were echoed in the cheers of the assembled multitude. At Southampton the enthusiasm was intense, and the *Dunnottar Castle*, conveying the general, together with several members of his staff, numerous war correspondents, and other persons of more or less importance, sailed under the most favourable auspices. On the following Friday the first section of the First Army Corps sailed from Southampton. This section numbered some 5,000 men, embarked in five vessels engaged for transport service.

Who are these broad-backed, deep-chested, bull-necked fellows, who walk as though the whole earth belonged to them? They look like men who take four square meals a day—mostly of beef. Who would like to be the Boers to tackle a lot like that? These are the 2nd West Yorkshires —men of the great West Riding. Athletes to a man. They can use the bayonet as few troops can. Three cheers for the Tykes!

Another train arrives—Hooray! The Queen's—the 2nd West Surreys. They don't look like raw boys, either. They are not so heavy as the men of the Riding, but they look lithe and tough enough for anything. One cheer more!

And the next train. These be the men of Devon—2nd Battalion. The 1st Battalion is out with White. This very minute they are polishing their bayonets and cleaning their rifles in Ladysmith ready for the pounce to Elandslaagte to-morrow. The Devons! An English cheer for the Devons! When was the fairest county in Britain ever wanting when the drums beat?

Hard on their heels follow the 2nd Battalion of the East Surreys—London boys these. And they will not flinch when the day comes. And last, but not least, the 2nd Battalion of the Northampton Regiment.

It does not take much to see that this is a peculiarly tough lot. They are not large and bulky, but they look smart and intelligent; and those who know them declare that they will fight like tigers. Altogether, this 5,000 of infantry are, if appearances go for anything, a splendid body of troops, meet custodians of the honour of their country.

There were five transports, all fine ships, probably the finest that have ever been used for transport on a large scale. The *Yorkshire* left first, carrying the 2nd Battalion West Surreys and some of the Medical Corps. The *Roslin Castle* followed with the 2nd Battalion West Yorkshires and part of the 2nd Devonshire Regiment. Then the *Lismore Castle* with part of the 2nd Battalion East Surreys. After her the *Harlech Castle* with the rest of the 2nd East Surreys and the 2nd Battalion of the Northampton Regiment. Last of all, the *Manilla*, carrying the remainder of the Devonshire Battalion, together with a number of details and stores of food, medicine, ammunition, and other such-like necessaries. The Commander-in-Chief of the British forces, Lord Wolseley, was present at the send-off.

The townsfolk of Southampton went mad. Quite mad. But no wonder. The

GENERAL BULLER IN THE BAY OF BISCAY

bands, the men in khaki, the something to be "wiped off the slate." The soldiers were loaded with little presents; cigarettes and cigars and packets of tobacco were thrust into their hands and were thrown to them on the ship. Everybody cheered. "The Queen!" Hip! hip! "Kroojer!" Groans. The working men especially seemed delighted. "Bring us a lock of Kroojer's 'air." "One for Buller!" Hip! hip! "One for White!" Hip! hip! One for everybody and everything. Hip! hip! And now the band plays "God save the Queen." Hats off! Ten thousand voices roar the anthem. Clear the gangway! They're off! And the first of the First Army Corps is on the way.

On the following days the Scots Guards (three detachments), the Coldstreams (three detachments), and the Grenadiers left home for the front amid the tears and cheers of a huge crowd.

No one can imagine it. No one can describe it. Five hundred thousand people assembled to yell; and they yelled, and they wished the men a pleasant journey to Pretoria. They exhorted them to "'Urry up! Else it will be all over afore you get there." Wished them a merry Christmas. Sent chaffing messages to "Paul." Rule Britannia! Britons never, never, never! Half a million of people sing or yell it. The men in khaki become infected. They sing. They are patted on the back. Can this be the sober English nation? Cabmen offer free rides to the station to all the brown-clad men. They crowd ten in a cab and some on the roof. Discipline seems at an end. And so London bids good-bye to its favourite troops; and as the train steams out of Nine Elms Station, the brass band plays, and the people, bareheaded, sing "God save the Queen."

Southampton was again the scene of embarkation, when another 5,000 troops were sent on their way to the seat of war. These troops included Scots Guards, Coldstreams, and Grenadiers (the last including over 450 reservists), some half a battalion of Northamptons, with companies and detachments of the Army Medical Corps, and telegraph, fortress, survey, and railway detachments of the Royal Engineers. There were 600 men of the Army Service Corps, the maids-of-all-work of the British army.

Generals Methuen, Clery, and Gatacre, commanding the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Divisions of the First Army Corps, embarked at the same time. They also had great and hearty greetings from the crowd—especially Gatacre, who had not long been back from the Soudan—an energetic man, who had earned from his men the nickname of "Old Back-acher." It was said of him that he could make his men move. He marched a brigade to Atbara fight without a whole boot to a company, but tough and hardened by exercise. And he himself walked the whole way, like any private.

And thus it went on for several days. Starting on October 20th, the corps got away with remarkable expedition, there being few delays except those caused by fog.

Down Southampton Water and down the Channel they went—50,000 men—carrying with them the hopes and aspirations of a united people. Aboard the transports, provision was made for their wants with a completeness never known before in the history of warfare. With a few exceptions (for which somebody had to be brought to book), the men were dieted on a liberal scale. They were provided with stocks of books and papers, and, at the special request of General Buller, were allowed and encouraged to take regular exercise on the upper decks of the ships.

The soldier *en voyage* is not quite a first-class passenger. He doesn't have a bunk to himself, nor does the steward run with a basin every time the gentleman feels a qualm. But he has some comforts and occasional luxuries; and if the sailors *do* chaff him and ask him why he doesn't keep his breakfast to himself, and if the quarters *are* a little confined, and if the condensed milk *does* run short and corned beef becomes a little monotonous —well, it's better than it used to be when they sent 500 men across the Atlantic in an enlarged shrimp-boat.

The country, having taken leave of her soldiers for a time, watched with some anxiety the progress of their several voyages. The First Army Corps reached its destination safely, with only one maritime mishap and without the loss of a single man from the perils of the sea. General Buller and his staff landed at Cape Town on October 31st.

By this time, the Boers had overrun Natal as far as Ladysmith, and, though checked at Talana Hill and Elandslaagte, were gradually surrounding White. And on the 29th and 30th had occurred the first disaster to the British arms — the fiasco of Nicholson's Nek.

It is not too much to say that the country—nay, the Empire—waited with feverish anxiety for news of the transports. To send 50,000 men at one time 6,000 miles across the ocean was something never attempted by any nation in history. Everybody asked, "Will the reinforcements arrive in time? Will they cross the sea without accident?"

The transports had been ordered to proceed to Cape Town for orders, and great was the relief when the *Roslin Castle*, carrying the 2nd West Yorkshires, reached Cape Town on November the 9th. She was straightway sent on to Durban, where she landed her troops on the 12th. And from that time the force in South Africa was augmented daily. Battalion, squadron, battery; horse, foot and artillery, poured into South Africa, and by the 5th of December had been landed in one or the other colony.

It had been a big undertaking—and one probably entirely new to every man who had been called upon to make and carry out the arrangement. For, in addition to the 50,000 men, the following among other material had been required and sent off for the use of the soldiers and for the transport service: traction engines, railway and telegraph plant, horses and mules, guns and ammunition, and food. It is somewhat difficult to say exactly how much material was sent out; but the mere feeding of an army involves the sending out of hundreds of tons of provisions. The food for the men and horses was carefully inspected, and it is to the credit of the various contractors that in few cases was it necessary to reject what had been sent in. But when the necessity did arise there was no hesitation in taking drastic action.

It was little short of marvellous that it should be so, but so it was, that with the exception of one transport that was wrecked, everything reached its destination safely.

The calling up of the Reserves meant, practically, the taking away from their work of 25,000 men. Most of these were workmen, and the majority were married. Consequently, large numbers of households were deprived of the man who earned the rent and the food; and, unless something was done, thousands of women and children must have starved.

As was to be expected, the generosity of

the country was aroused, and the people were exhorted to "Pay! pay! pay!" And pay they did right royally.

The first fund to be opened was one for the assistance of the Transvaal refugees who had been turned out of that territory at short notice. Many of these were in an impecunious state. Then there was the usual Mansion House Fund for the relief of the widows and orphans; there were funds to meet the wants of the families of the reservists opened in nearly every county and large town.

Needless to say, these various funds were liberally supported—as were a number of minor funds for the supply of particular articles, from sleeping-caps to field-glasses. The response was from all sorts and conditions of men, women, and children. The men gave their cheques, or their sovereigns, their shillings or their coppers—on the principle of give early and give often. Ladies of all ranks employed their busy fingers in making comfortable clothing for the men at the front—socks and night-caps, vests and comforters; and one lady made a speciality of knitted Tam-o'-Shanters. Silvery tongues begged the needed cash from their several male relatives and friends.

There was no need to press for subscriptions; the people, rich and poor, recognised their responsibility and paid cheerfully. The contributions of the wealthy firms and companies were effectively supplemented by the moderate gifts of those of moderate means. But the contributions of the working men and women—which often meant to them the surrender of pleasures and even of comforts—were notable and valuable. To find tramway men and agricultural labourers and washerwomen giving a day's pay—to hear of workmen giving a weekly contribution from wages earned in the mines and forges and ironworks—told us that, after all, the world is not so bad as some pessimists would have us believe. The poorer classes gave of their penury, while the richer gave of their abundance.

And it was quite clear that the man and his family who would forego their visit to the theatre, or reduce the quantity of their supper beer, to make provision for the wounded and the widowed and orphaned, were made of the right stuff.

The details of these various funds we will give later on—sufficient for the present to notice the generous and spontaneous manner in which they were supported.

Private employers of labour were not less generous. Manufacturer and merchant, shopkeeper and warehouseman, all behaved handsomely to the brave fellows who were called away to fight their country's battles. In scores of cases the wife of the reservist was given half her husband's wages during his absence; and it was the rule for employers to say, "Good-bye and good luck! I'll look after the wife and little ones; and your place will be kept open for you." In many mines and shops and factories the mates of the man called away made a little subscription—usually sixpence or so per week per man—for the benefit of "the little things" that Tommy had "left behind him"; and frequently the wife or the old mother dependent on Tommy's wages found herself no whit worse off on Saturday night than she would if Tommy had been at home.

The people in Great Britain were at one. This was not a war of kings; it was a war of the people. And in the mind of the people it was as righteous as necessary. And the feeling at home was shared in our

colonies, which proffered sympathy and help, showing that blood was thicker than water. From Canada and Australia and India offers of help poured in so promptly that our authorities seemed almost paralysed. This difficulty, and that and the other difficulty, were seen. But the true sons of Britain were not to be denied. Volunteers from Canada and Australia and India—of whom such splendid samples were seen in the Queen's Jubilee Procession of 1897—pressed their services on the home Government with an ardour that would not be denied.

As they had shared in the honours of a triumphal march, they were willing to share the dangers of the field of battle. From every part of the Empire came distinct evidences that the mother and her sons were a united family in heart and in spirit, and that the cause was the cause of the Imperial race upon whose empire the sun never sets.

On the 12th of October the Legislative Assembly of Victoria, by 67 votes to 13, passed a resolution expressing loyalty to the Queen and sympathy with the home Government. Promising to embark her contribution of infantry and mounted infantry on the 28th, the Governor of Victoria telegraphed: "The troops will be ready to share in defence of British interests in South Africa, and British officers may have confidence in them."

The Canadian Government were ready to send 1,200 men to the front, but the home Government were only willing to accept 500 at that time; and these were equipped and ready within ten days. The other colonies followed suit in grants of men and money.

It was not merely the material help that was valuable. Of far more worth was the moral support—the spirit of the thing. Foreign countries could see that the Empire was united by something more than mere political ties.

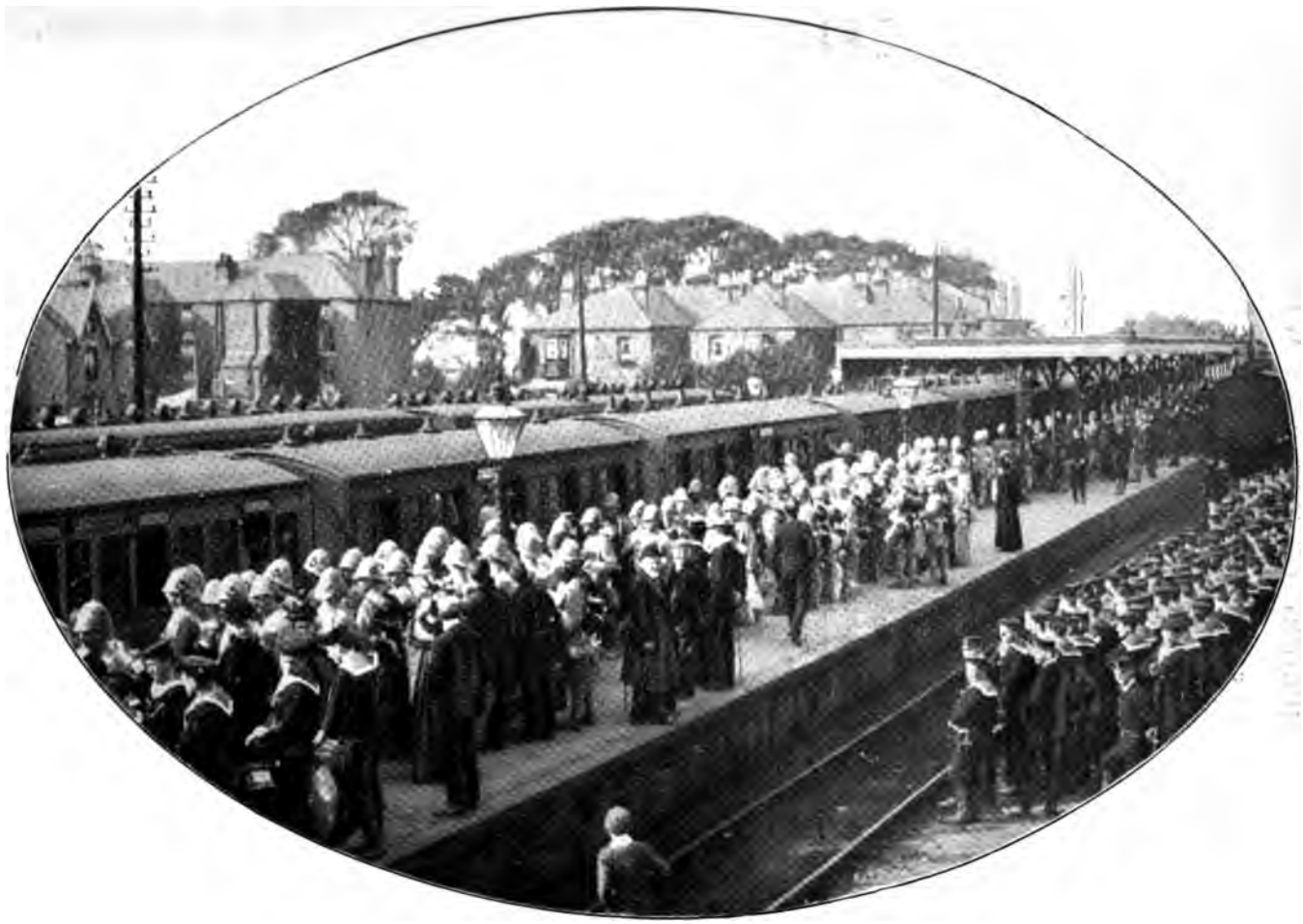
> "Though your home
> Is not these isles amid the foam,
> Ye come across the unfettered sea
> Speaking the world-speech of the free." *

And so ships turned their prows to South Africa, bearing the sons of the Empire from New Zealand and the provinces of Australia, from Canada, and from Tasmania. These, with the volunteers already raised in Natal and the Cape, were to show that Britain's sons are still her sons, in whatever latitude they dwell.

One act must not be forgotten. In Ceylon, the local volunteers offered to garrison the island, to allow the regular troops to be employed at the front. Now this colony, like the Cape, was originally Dutch, and numbers of the Ceylon volunteers bore Dutch names. Yet they, too, were anxious to do something for the Empire.

Equally satisfactory was the attitude of America. The English-speaking race was shoulder to shoulder. The American Press, with scarcely an exception, was pro-English. An opportunity was afforded to our American cousins to help us without departing from the position of neutrals—in the form of contributions in aid of the sick and wounded and bereaved. And the American ladies resident in London issued a characteristic manifesto appealing to Americans for the sum of £30,000 for the purpose of despatching and equipping a hospital ship with an efficient staff of doctors and nurses. Lady Randolph Churchill presided over the movement, having for colleagues the Duchess of Marlborough, the Countess of Essex, Mrs.

* From "True Sons of Britain," a poem of the time, by Mr. Mackenzie Bell.



THE QUEEN'S ROYAL WEST SURREY REGIMENT ENTRAINING AT COSHAM. *(Photo: Stephen Cribb, Southsea.)*

... Chamberlain, and a host of well-... society leaders.

... projects were set on foot, includ-... grand bazaar and concerts. It is to ... that on the day that the bazaar ... Lady Randolph Churchill's son, ... Winston Churchill, was wounded and ... prisoner by the enemy while acting ... correspondent of the *Morning Post*. ... Cabell, of the U.S.A. Army Medical ..., was granted special leave of absence ... that he might act as surgeon of ... hospital ship—the good ship *Maine*, ... was fitted out and despatched to ... seat of war. The money required ... easily obtained, and the completeness ... the vessel and her equipment won the admiration of medical experts as well as the gratitude of the British people.

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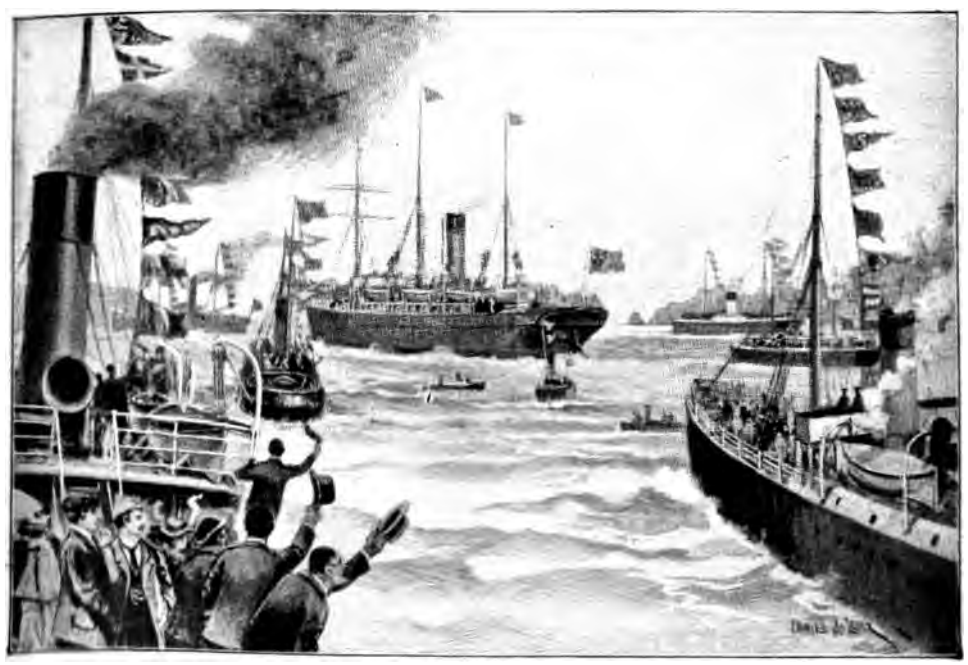

DEPARTURE OF THE NEW ZEALAND CONTINGENT FROM WELLINGTON ON BOARD THE *WAIWERA*.

CHAPTER VIII.

NATAL—AFTER THE BATTLE OF ELANDSLAAGTE.

THE horrors of that night only the wounded knew. When the fight ended it was pitch dark. The doctor and ambulance men had a few feeble lanterns; but, in the main, their only guide to the wounded were their groans and shrieks.

One officer was lying on the ground for thirteen hours. He was wounded early in the battle, and the doctor had crawled up to him and put a hasty dressing on his wound, placed his own helmet for a pillow, and covered him with a Boer blanket. Then the poor fellow was left to himself. There all night he was lying, on one side of him a Gordon Highlander, delirious from a wound, shrieking and raving and making night hideous. It was cold—terribly cold—as cold that night as it had been hot at noon. It rained. Heavens! how it rained! The blanket was soon soaked as thoroughly as if it had been plunged in a stream. Worst of all, there was the thirst.

Even a strong man and a healthy would find it a terrible privation to go thirsty more than twenty-four hours. Yet that is what this officer, wounded and feverish as he was, had to undergo. Nor was his the worst case. Another officer was lying on the bouldery plateau all that night, bleeding from three wounds. He bore the pain as a soldier and a gentleman should suffer. Still, now and then, a moan escaped his parched, cracked lips. Another poor wretch, a private of his company, himself badly hit, crawled up and administered some words of rough comfort.

Thrice fortunate was the wounded man whose pipe was unbroken and whose tobacco was plentiful. Tobacco is wonderfully soothing to the smoker at all times of pain and distress; and its narcotic property, without doubt, helps to stay the cravings of the stomach. A cigarette was worth more than much gold that night; and the ploughman's lad who could command a cutty pipe and a fill of shag was richer than all the millionaires of the Rand and of Kimberley.

Many wounded were picked up, and blankets and brandy were given to them; but even they could not be taken from the ground that night. It was too dark to try to carry ambulances down the steep, rough ground to the village of Elandslaagte, though a few were carried to the Boer laager. The rest were lying there all night. And the cold and the rain froze and washed the breath of life out of them.

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The sun rose in his splendour that Sunday morning; and what a sight was there! The night before, with its terrible sounds, had been sufficiently horrible; but now to groans and screams of the wounded were added the dreadful sights of the carnage.

Where are Sam and Bill and Jock, and the rest of them? Let us go out and search the field. We know they fell at our side yesterday, somewhere on that hillside; but whether dead or wounded, whether merely disabled or mortally hit, there was no time to ask. And so little parties go out and search. And Sam is found lying there all doubled up, his tunic red, his rifle with bayonet fixed. "Here, Doctor, see if this man's alive." A hasty diagnosis. "No! He's as dead as last Christmas! Poor chap!"

And the comrades in soft, broad Lancashire speech, pronounce his epitaph. "'E were a good lad, were Sam. A reet good sort. 'E never thought as 'e'd see 'is end in this job. But 'e done 'is bit." And, more softly, "'E's got a wife and two kids in Salford. Poor beggars!"

And Bill they find on the kopje slope, his ruddy face, once so merry and full of life, now pallid and fixed in death. Great Heaven! Can this be Bill, with a hole in his head and two in his chest? Nasty, blue-edged, insignificant-looking holes. No need for surgeon's skill here. Bill can never rise more—never, till the Great Day. And a mother on the banks of the Dart puts on crape. And for many a month the rosy cheeks of a West-country lass are pale, and her bright eyes dim and red-rimmed. And the ploughmen and the shepherds, as they meet in street and lane and alehouse, say in their sleepy way, "'Ave 'ee 'eerd, naow, o' pore Bill?" "Aye, aye!" "An' 'is pore mother's pore soul!" But even these peasants are the true sons of those who showed the mettle of their pasture at Agincourt one St. Crispin's Day long ago. For they say, "'E were a brave lad, was Bill. An' 'is mother ain't got no call to be ashamed o' 'e. Oi 'eard as his wounds was all in front."

And Jock, too, is lying among the boulders. His kilt in rags, torn by the jagged rocks. His face dreadful to look upon from the frightful scowl of ferocious triumph that Death has indelibly engraved upon it.

Bring spades. Dig graves. Bury them here, on the ground their blood has watered, in the field their valour has won. They died for the honour of the Empire and their native land. Their bravery and their bayonets have written "Elandslaagte" in bold, red letters on the page of Britain's history. Northerner and Southerner, Scot and Englishman—lay them reverently in the earth. For they died *pro patriâ*.

And the men in the brown Bedford cord, without coats, with shirt-sleeves rolled up—bury them too. Stolid Teutonic gunners, heavy-moustached and fair-haired. Never more will they train a gun or hurl a shell. Here is one of them, a yard from his piece, with his wounds in the front. A bullet has shattered his arm. There is another, gashed in ghastly fashion by a fragment of shell. Yet another, with a splash of blood on his chest. Turn him over. There is another splash on his back. That is a Devon bayonet's dreadful work. The steel, with the full weight of a man behind it, has been driven in at the breast-bone and out between the shoulder-blades. See! Here is one who died with his fingers pressing a cartridge into his magazine.

Look at those men all in a heap, their faces distorted with pain. They are not all dead—those that live wish they were. Anything to quit this agony! There are Boers and Hollanders, and Frenchmen and Slavs amongst these. Every face seems to be of a different type from every other.

ESCORTING WOUNDED BOER PRISONERS INTO LADYSMITH.

But one thing they have in common—a fixed look of terror.

For these are the men whose blood now reddens the points of the Lancers' weapons. These are the flying men whom the chargers ploughed through three times in the dark. And that fearful look of agony came upon them when they felt the lance-point.

A lance is, as a soldier would say, the most "effective" weapon of all for use in a pursuit, or for a charge upon a disorganised mass of infantry. The weapon is held with its point sloping downward, and the lancer so carries it that it is thrust into the foe with all the force of the horse's gallop behind it. Generally, it runs through and through the man whom it strikes. Over he goes, and the lancer, carried past him by the force of the charge, drags the weapon out of the wound it has made. Frequently the shaft of the lance breaks at this moment, and the point and part of the wood is left sticking in the wound. Perhaps a lance wound is the most ghastly of all, except the one made by the flying splinter of a shell.

And there they lie, pierced through and through, with wounds in back and front. You can almost hear the shriek for mercy.

Cover the dead with brown earth. Take

up the wounded and bear them as gently as ye may where English surgeon can minister. For there is one class of man who makes no difference between friend and foe: and that is the Army Medical Corps. We beg its pardon—the ROYAL Army Medical Corps. If you omit the prefix you hurt somebody's feelings.

All the time of the battle, all that horrible night after, these noble men have been calmly walking about, regardless of the rain, whether it be of lead or of water. Tireless, cheery. "What's this—the leg! Let me look——! Yes! I'll put on something to staunch the bleeding!" In a moment those deft, strong fingers have made a rough bandage, and the red blood ceases to flow from the limb. "Now lie down! Here! I'll put your helmet for your head to rest on. Now your overcoat. There! that's as comfortable as I can manage. It's not Netley; but it's the best we can do. Take a nip of this. Now to light your pipe! What? Well, here's a cigarette." All in the most businesslike fashion. He's gone, but a voice calls him back. "What? Oh! Yes! That's all right! We're winning fast enough!" A grateful voice murmurs rough thanks; and the messenger of mercy resumes his dangerous errand.

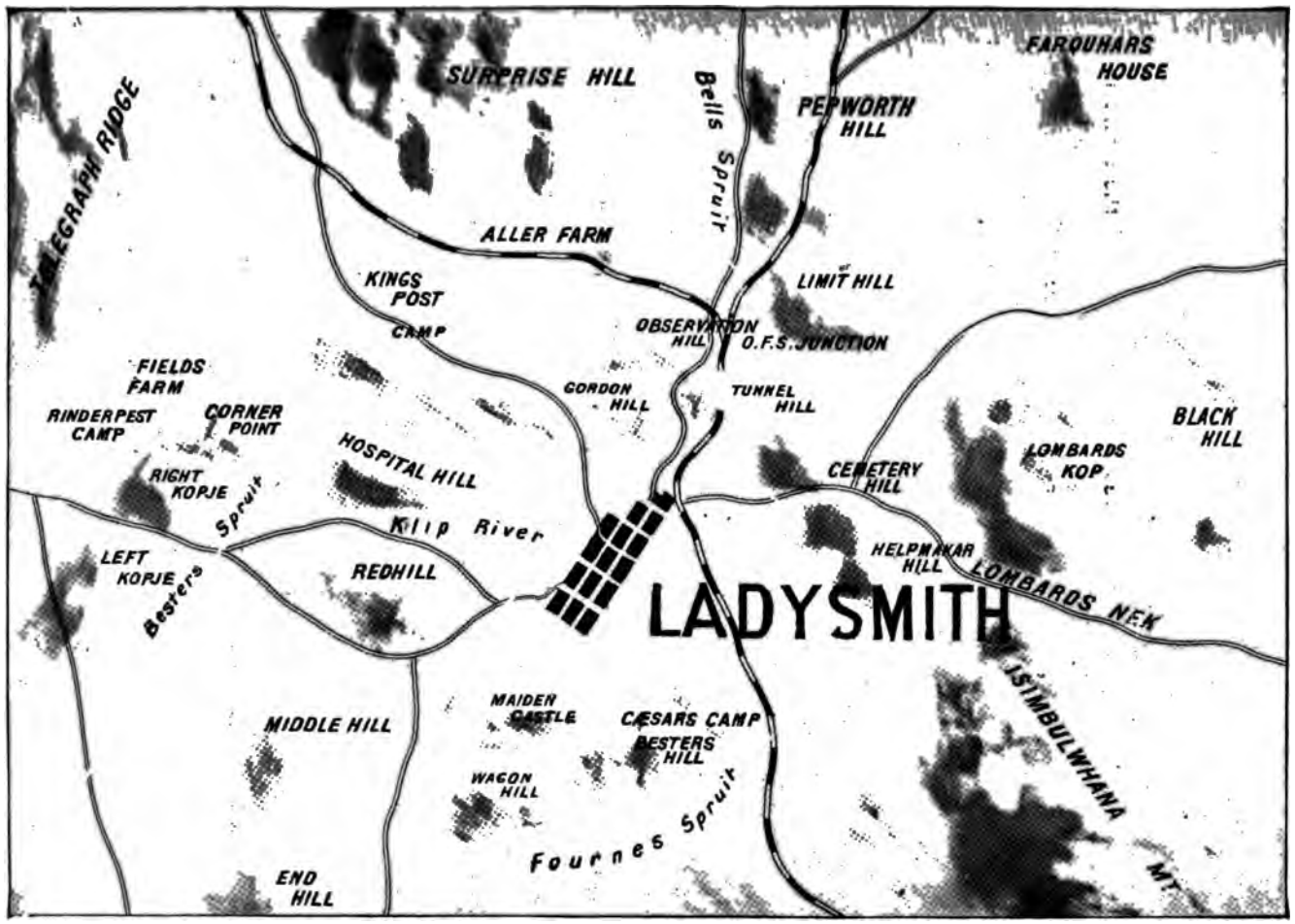
And after the battle he binds up with equal cheerfulness and skill and attention, chatting jovially the while. "Hullo! corporal! *You've* got it, have you? Never mind; you'll be back with the colours in a month." And the non-com. with the bit of lead in his thigh smiles through his pain. He has tremendous faith in "Pills," as he irreverently calls his medical attendant.

Whom Tommy loves, he nicknames. His greatest hero is "Bobs." The Great Lady for whom he would die anyhow and anywhere, was "The Old Lady," "The Widder," or "The Widder of Windser." The colonel is "The Old Man," or "Chips." And the doctor is "Pills."

Equally cheerful is the surgeon when his patient is a Boer. "Drink!" murmurs the poor wretch. "Here, take a nip of this." And the ready brandy-flask is applied to the parched lips of the wounded prisoner. "Now, let's see! Um-m-m. Ye-es. You'll be all right soon." The Boer looks incredulous. "Understand English? Oh! You do. Well! Listen! You'll be better in a month." And he binds up the wound as skilfully and carefully as he would were the patient the Commander-in-Chief of Her Majesty's forces.

But despite the efforts of the Medical Staff, despite all that officers and comrades could do to alleviate their sufferings, there was much unnecessary misery amongst the wounded. I say "unnecessary"; for I know that a man with a wound, or perhaps two, or even three, is not and cannot be without suffering and pain. And in this battle, the lateness of the hour of attack, which left the wounded to be picked up in the dark, added to that necessary suffering. So also did the fact that the army was fifteen miles from its base.

You see, it was never intended to be a battle at first, but only a bit of scouting or reconnoitring on a large scale. Battle was only resolved upon when General French found the enemy less strong and less well supported than he had at first imagined—when he found, that is, that they were an independent force, and not in touch with the main body at Bester's. Hence preparations had been hasty. There were no tents or any cover for the men. That, perhaps, was unavoidable under the circumstances.



MAP OF LADYSMITH AND COUNTRY ROUND.

But what was avoidable was the horrible hunger and thirst suffered by the men and officers. It seemed as though in the keenness for a fight everything had been forgotten about commissariat. Our men took no provisions with them ; and the result was that hungry, weary men were without food—or almost without food—and wounded men without water for over twenty-four hours. This is inexplicable in view of the fact that the railway to Ladysmith was still open.

One wounded officer received a nip of brandy from a surgeon ere nightfall. The next sustenance to pass his lips came twenty-seven hours later. Previously he had been for ten hours without food. It was from seventeen to twenty-four hours before wounds were dressed, except for the "field dressing" applied on the ground—the wounded having to be carried to Ladysmith for the purpose.

Imagine the horror of it ! Your lips cracked and parching. Your throat and mouth so dry that the roots of your tongue were beginning to swell. You choked, salivaless. They carried you down, jolting horribly, from the hill to the station, and laid you in a railway carriage. You jolted along to Ladysmith for about three or four hours. You fainted time and again from weakness, hunger, and loss of blood, and you came to yourself best way you could. All this time the sun was blazing, blazing with tropical heat. The air was thick with groans of strong men in agony.

Arrived at the railway journey's end, they carried you to a bullock-cart ; and a bullock-cart is the most jolty conveyance in the world except the back of a camel. A couple of miles to the hospital ! You might shut your teeth and swear that you wouldn't. It was no good—you had to groan : this was the only ease you could have.

And if you reached the hospital alive, you might calculate on a speedy recovery ; for you must have a magnificent constitution and wonderful stamina.

The condition of the sound men was not enviable. As for their appearance, there was none of the taut, trim appearance that people at home associate with Mr. Thomas Atkins. Not a wash to be had. Stubble of several days' growth on lip and chin. Khaki uniforms sodden with wet and covered with mud, and many torn and tattered. Some had kilt and khaki simply in ribbons by reason of the crawl over the broken, rocky hill, and overcoats one great mud-plaster from sleeping on the muddy ground. Helmets had got lost, knocked off in the fierce scrimmage.

Altogether they looked like a herd of tramps rather than a contingent of the finest men in the sprucest army in the world.

And they were weary, as weary could be, for they had lain out all night in that sickening downpour. The officers were the worst off, for they had no greatcoats as the men had. Many a soldier had bitterly cursed that rolled-up greatcoat as he was struggling and toiling up the hill ; but he was glad enough of it ere morning broke.

And as if the wet and the cold and the exposure were not enough, there was little or nothing to eat. The Boer laager had yielded some plunder—not much, but a little ; and even in the dark our men had managed to lay hold of a few sides of bacon and a very little bread. So that here and there you might see a Tommy gnawing at a nauseous-looking hunk of raw bacon. Some Scotch whisky was

also amongst the loot, and it did not go begging.

Then in the township of Elandslaagte a little was found in the morning, making, perhaps, a mouthful to a man. War is not all exciting processions through the streets. It is not all brass bands and exhilarating bagpipes. It is not even all rifle and bayonet and the storming of entrenchments.

Still, Tommy and Sandy and Pat did not complain. They joked and chaffed half-humorously, half-sadly. "They'll be 'avin' their 'am an' eggs now, at 'ome," remarked a yellow-haired young private, ruefully. "They'll be in their bloomin' warm beds, *you* mean," another rejoined. "I'll guarantee my old man is up—'e's allus up at 'arf past five." "But it ain't 'arf past five there yet, looney. It's about 'arf past three. And I shud think your old man wouldn't be such a fool as ter be up at 'arf past three on a blessid Sunday mornin'. Might as well be a nigger!" "W'en I fust j'ined the reg'ment, I thought barricks was a blessed 'ole, I did. But lumme!"*—

A WAR BALLOON "ON THE MARCH."

and he shrugged his shoulders and looked around.

Likewise, gathered in knots, they discussed the conduct of their officers. You might have heard many a "Now, wot *I* shud 'a done would 'a bin——." For there are tacticians in the ranks as well as amongst those who carry

* These and other similar expressions of opinion are founded on talks which the writer had with returned soldiers.

Joseph Chamberlain, and a host of well-known society leaders.

Various projects were set on foot, including a grand bazaar and concerts. It is to be noted that on the day that the bazaar was held Lady Randolph Churchill's son, Mr. Winston Churchill, was wounded and taken prisoner by the enemy while acting as war correspondent of the *Morning Post*. Major Cabell, of the U.S.A. Army Medical Corps, was granted special leave of absence in order that he might act as surgeon of the hospital ship—the good ship *Maine*, which was fitted out and despatched to the seat of war. The money required was easily obtained, and the completeness of the vessel and her equipment won the admiration of medical experts as well as the gratitude of the British people.

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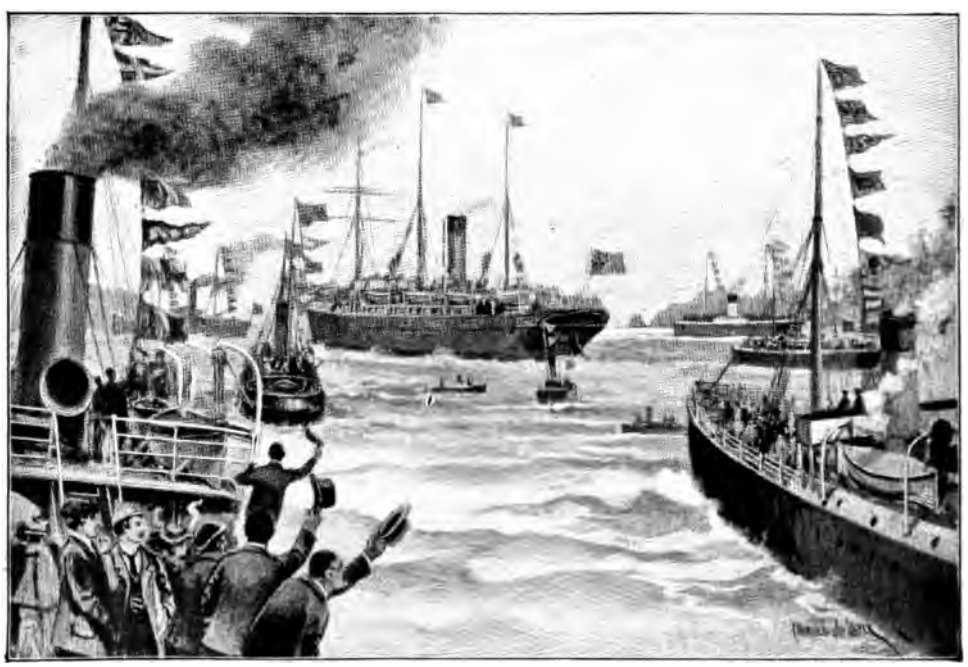

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wonder that they rejoiced over the discomfiture of their ancient enemies.

"These are," said they, "the white men who have oppressed us so long. They enslaved us until our White Mother made them give us freedom. They made a law compelling us to become apprentices to them, at no wages. Even now they treat us like dogs and slaves in all their country. To-day they are beaten. Let us rejoice."

Little wonder, I say. Still, it was a most unfortunate occurrence. The prisoners, however, bore themselves bravely and with dignity.

Now, at last, there was rest and some comfort. The wounded were taken into hospital, the public buildings being fitted up for the purpose. Mattresses were placed in the churches and beds in the Town Hall; and a field used by the townsfolk for sports had some tents erected on it. There were plenty of women who volunteered to nurse the wounded.

Even the Boer wounded found friends; for there were plenty of Dutch-descended people in the town who sympathised with and were anxious to assist them. They received exactly the same attention from the hospital staff as did our own wounded; indeed, to the credit of both sides be it said, no distinction was ever made in this respect. Into whose hands soever a wounded man fell, he could always be sure of kindly treatment and the most careful nursing and skilled aid that could be found.

It has often been remarked how two schoolboys, after they have indulged in a regular set-to, and have given one another bloody noses and black eyes, will become the warmest of friends and the closest of allies. How many lifelong friendships, I wonder, have begun with a battle in the playground? Is it the mutual respect for one another's prowess, or what is it?

And so here. Tommy Atkins and the brown-skinned, bearded farmer from Krugersdorp, after firing and battering at each other with deadliest intent on Saturday afternoon, found themselves on Sunday evening side by side in hospital. Most of the prisoners spoke English quite fluently, and soon conversation began to flow. The farmer now knew the *rooinek* to be a fine, manly fellow, not a man who ran away from straight shooting. Tommy saw that the farmer, instead of being a cross between a fanatic and a savage, was a man and a brother—tough, stark, obstinate; but still a man and a brother, much like lots of people he knew at home. And if a friend brought Tommy a packet of cigarettes, or a little fruit, or some other luxury, the farmer never went short while the store lasted.

And there is little doubt that some day the Boer will revise his estimate of the Briton, and the Briton of the Boer.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RETREAT FROM DUNDEE.

TIRED, hungry, weary to death from long fasting, hard climbing, and harder fighting, soaked to the skin, the men of the Dundee column returned from Talana Hill into the camp of the town. The wounded, both Boer and British, were searched for on the field of battle, and brought in on stretchers and blankets; and it was late on Friday evening when the British soldiers laid down to rest. Usually during a battle some part of the force is kept practically inactive, so that when the day is won they may perform the duty of guarding the camp; but this day every man had been either fighting or marching from dawn to dusk. For even the Leicestershires and the 67th Battery had been compelled to turn out to meet another force of Dutchmen who threatened an attck from Hattings Spruit. This was a force under the command of Commandant Erasmus, 9,000 strong.

Of course the Boers were perfectly well acquainted with the numbers and position of every British detachment. We say "of course," because there were plenty of Natal Dutchmen, subjects of the Queen, who sympathised with their blood relations, the Boers, rather than with the country of their allegiance. Bester, the richest farmer in North Natal, who gave his name to a considerable district, was believed to be one of the traitors, and he had relations —sons and nephews—who were known sympathisers with the Boers. And so the invaders knew to a man the strength of General Symons's force and his isolated position, and had laid their plans accordingly.

It was arranged between the leaders to make a simultaneous attack. Meyer was to make a night march across the Buffalo River by way of Landman's Drift, and march along over road and veldt to Talana Hill, overlooking Dundee, and he was timed to arrive on the night of the 19th or early morning of the 20th. Meanwhile Erasmus was to bring his force by way of Hattings Spruit,* and arrive a little later—the intention being that Meyer should draw the British force to attack him, and while they were so engaged, the 9,000 should arrive on the scene and fall on the flank of the camp.

It was a good scheme; and would doubtless have inflicted a horrible defeat, if not annihilation, upon the British division, but for one little thing. It is the little thing that spoils the schemes of men and mice. In this case it was the fact that Erasmus miscalculated his distance slightly, and did not arrive until the afternoon. By that time the battle of Talana Hill was to all intents and purposes lost and won. True, a great alarm was created amongst the staff by scouts' reports that at Hattings Spruit another force was on the move; but our general knew that if he was to be attacked by the larger force, he had better polish off the little force first. He could not hope, in a place like that, to defend himself against 13,000 men. Possibly he might manage to cope with the 9,000 if he

* A "spruit" is a small stream.

could settle the 4,000 first. So he set about the 4,000. With what result I have told in the first chapter.

He did not neglect, however, to keep an eye on Mr. Commandant Erasmus; and by way of so doing he sent his small

GENERAL YULE.
(Photo: H. Yeo, Plymouth.)

reserves, one battalion and a battery, the 1st Leicestershire Regiment and the 67th Battery, to meet that dilatory general. Late in the afternoon these troops met the advance guard of the 9,000, and skirmished with them somewhat—the battery dropping some shrapnel near them. The advance guard retired on the main body, and doubtless reported. What they reported history sayeth not; but this much is certain: General Erasmus's main body did not put in an appearance on the scene of action that day. Whereat the heart of Lucas Meyer was stirred in anger, and he sent in a hot report to General Joubert. For if General Erasmus had been up to time, Lucas Meyer would not, in all human probability, have been driven off the hill of Talana with the loss of many men, and two flags, and much glory.

Saturday morning opened quietly enough for the Dundee contingent; and the forenoon was spent even hilariously, notwithstanding that the general and many comrades were lying wounded in the town. For the sense of victory obliterates almost

every other feeling ; and if the truth must be told, the Rifles were thinking more of the two Transvaal flags they had taken than of the colonel they had lost. But soon after three a heavy rain fell and the sky became black with clouds. Suddenly, without any warning, there fell into the camp a shell—evidently from a gun of heavy calibre. It soon became apparent that a force of the enemy was in position on the west and north occupying the hills there. Our field pieces attempted to reply, but the enemy's guns were guns of position, and their shells came from 6,000 yards distance, to which our field artillery could not carry.

In a trice arrangements were made for shifting the camp out of range. Well it was that the Boer shells were not of the same quality as their gunnery. They rained shells upon our camp, but only one burst. A splinter from this struck Lieutenant Hannah, an officer in the Leicestershire Regiment, and killed him on the spot.

A shell wound, be it known—that is, a wound made by a flying fragment of a burst shell—is the most ghastly-looking wound seen on the battlefield. The flesh is torn, sometimes the body cut in halves. Sometimes the skull smashed as a walnut would be smashed by a steam hammer. Fortune favoured General Yule. For after an hour's bombardment there descended upon hill and valley a heavy mist, and, under cover of it, he shifted his camp 2¼ miles to the south, where the ground was higher and he was out of range. I say he "shifted" the camp ; but that is not quite what he did—rather he abandoned the camp.

Late in the evening, when the men were lying on the sodden ground, exposed to the full fury of the drenching rainstorm, they were cheered by the news of the victory of Elandslaagte. Tired as they were, they did not grumble when General Yule sent half of them to Glencoe to intercept fugitives, and ordered the other half back to the old camp. The party at Glencoe was exposed to the fire of the heavy guns, which began again to rain shells impartially on them and on the camp ; and after a skirmish between some of our Hussars and artillery and a body of Boers, the Glencoe detachment returned to camp. Sunday dawned with the Boers on the hills and the British in Dundee.

Obviously, it was impossible for General Yule to defend that position. He could not reply to the big guns. Three courses were open to him. One was to surrender —a course he does not seem to have ever seriously thought of.

A second was to attack the enemy and clear him out of the hills and capture his guns. The third to fall back on Ladysmith. Either of these was dangerous in the extreme. An attack would mean assaulting a force of double his own numbers, superior to him in artillery and in position—a course, moreover, which would necessitate him dividing his little army into two.

In addition, his men were exhausted with fighting and marching and countermarching and exposure. To retreat would be equally dangerous, for the only road open was the Helpmakaar Road to Ladysmith over the Biggarsberg range through the Waschbank Pass; and nothing would have been easier than for the Boers, with their mobile force, to occupy the heights overlooking that pass, and to shoot our men down as they passed underneath (see Map, p. 5). Even had they shot the oxen of the leading transport waggon the column would have been blocked.

The direct road, *vit* Glencoe, was occupied by the Boers in force.

On Sunday night General Yule issued an order for the whole force to turn out in fighting trim. The men were to be without greatcoats, one biscuit per man was served out to be carried, and only the ammunition waggons were to accompany them. It was, then, to be an attack. The order passed through the camp, and was received with joy. For the men, tired as they were, were flushed with their Friday's victory, and doubted not their ability to storm any position held by any number of Boers whatsoever. It was to be a night attack to surprise the Boers—not much surprise, however, for the army of voluntary spies speedily carried the tidings to the Boer lines.

On that night, some 9,000 men waited on the hills, rifle in hand and guns loaded, but no attack was ever delivered. When it was well dark, about nine o'clock, the column silently took the road ; but they did not direct their steps north or west, instead they struck south along the Helpmakaar Road.

Silently, swiftly they marched. A party of the Rifles led, and then the waggons, drawn by teams of mules. The pace was what sporting writers term "a cracker." "Quick!" And the men moved at three miles an hour. "Double!" And they broke into a trot. "Quick!" again. Once more, "Double!" It was so dark, you could not see two yards ahead of you.

For four hours the men moved at this pace. The roads were muddy with the rains ; and by the time the mules and waggons had passed over it and the first few companies had trodden it, the slush was dreadful. It was bad for the rear battalions.

It is a fact known to all who have travelled much in the night that one loses all sense of direction when there is absolutely no light at all. And the little force in this case had no idea of where it was going. I speak, of course, of the rank and file.

Hullo! What's this? Obviously we have struck a village. What village? Cautiously, men! for if there be rebels here, the Boers will soon know that we are retreating down the Helpmakaar Road.

But soon somebody sees something that causes him to utter an exclamation of disgusted surprise. It is the British hospital. "What!" True enough. And the word buzzes through the ranks : "We are back again in Dundee." After all this quick and double marching, so toilsome, so tiring, the column had performed a complete circle!

"Shure! They've brought us out for exercise!" says the funny man of A Company.

"It's a circus, bedad!" ejaculated the wit of F Company.

And the Irish battalions and the Rifles and the Leicesters, and everybody, curses softly to itself. What the officers think is not recorded.

A halt ; but for half an hour only. And then the tired men set out again on the Helpmakaar Road. It is imperative to make the most of the last few hours of darkness ; and so, silently and swiftly, they start again. They ought to be twelve or fifteen miles on their road by this time. And for the first time the men realise that they are retreating. March, march, until nine o'clock in the morning. Then only is it safe to call a halt, and the weary soldiers lie down in the mud for a rest. For a couple of hours or more they wait there, and lament the cruel fate that drags them away from the foe. A night attack

would have been much more to their taste than a night retreat.

At ten o'clock they hear the sound of a distant gun, and they think of the wounded—the general, the officers, the comrades—lying there in Dundee.

Even when dawn broke the Boer general had no idea of what had taken place. The camp was still standing, the Red Cross was flying over the hospital, men were riding about. For a few adventurous spirits, including some newspaper correspondents, actually remained in Dundee until past eight o'clock on Monday morning. It was not until about ten that the Boers discovered how they had been tricked. At that hour their long-range guns began to shell the camp again. There was no reply, and the Boers wondered much thereat.

But it is part of their own tactics to lie low, and by not responding to the enemy's fire to induce the belief that they have deserted their position. Thus the enemy is lured on, only to be met by a devastating fire at short range. Our men were to find out this part of Boer tactics ere long, and the discovery was to cost them dear. At ten o'clock there was no sign of life or motion in Dundee; the Boers cautiously advanced within rifle range. Still no response, and so in time they discovered that the camp was empty save for the wounded. The stupid Englanders had outwitted them!

The most direct road from Dundee to Ladysmith was through Glencoe and along the road running pretty much with the railway. This route would only be a little over forty miles to march, and, moreover, it might have been possible for General Yule to communicate with his general-in-chief at Ladysmith, and have trains sent up at least as far as Elandslaagte.

But Yule had reconnoitred the enemy's position and forces, and found that a pass at Glencoe through which he must move if he used that route was very strongly held by them, and if he tried to break through them he would have to attack a very strong position held by an enemy superior in numbers and in artillery. And Yule's men were tired. Moreover, it would have been almost impossible for him to get away his guns and his stores of ammunition by that route. Infantry by a sudden dash might have cloven a way through, but General Yule knew quite well that once the Boers saw him making a move towards Ladysmith they would have declined to meet him at close contact, and would content themselves with sniping behind boulders at long rifle range, and shelling from such a distance that our guns could not reply to theirs.

A retreat by the Helpmakaar road meant adding something like twenty miles to the journey—a distinct consideration. But that was the safe plan. If he could get a few hours' start he would be able to cover the most difficult and dangerous portion of the way before the enemy could properly pursue him. Unfortunately, the blunder of the night before had added to the distance.

Resting till after noon, General Yule gave the order to resume the route. On wended the two-mile-long column. The men downcast, though not by any means frightened. Suddenly a few Boers appeared in sight, riding hard. "Begorra! there's going to be a skirmish, after all," remarked a delighted Irish private. But there was not. Those Boers had quite enough business of their own to think about. They were a few stragglers bolting north after Saturday's battle at

"THE SOLDIERS WADE THROUGH THE WASCHBANK RIVER" (p. 108).

Elandslaagte, and not, as all thought, the scouts of a large force.

The road now lay from south to slightly east of a place called Beith, where there is a cross formed by four roads meeting. One was the road running north to Dundee and south to Helpmakaar and the ferry over the Tugela, and thence to Greytown, and the other the road from Ladysmith to Rorke's Drift on the Buffalo River. A great part of the road was highly dangerous to a retreating force such as this. It had to march south and slightly east about ten miles to Beith, and after that another ten miles before reaching the Waschbank River. Now it was specially dangerous between Beith and that river bank. The road was winding, so that one end of the column could not see the other. There was plenty of cover for marksmen, should any such be on the look out, and, worst of all, there was the Waschbank Pass, or nek, where 100 men might hold the road against an army.

The general resolved that he would march by night—a forced march—through this difficult part of the country. And so that Monday afternoon they started, and in the evening reached Beith. Some thought there would now be a halt; not so. "Right wheel!" and the column is marching in the dark along the high road to the Waschbank River. "Keep off my heel, ye blackguard!" "What's that? another blessed mule died?"—referring to an over-ridden army service beast. "I'd rather have stayed and fit the beggars." "Wiped us out? Very likely; but we could have wiped out some of them first." "Better have stayed behind and been shot than march along 'ere the 'ole night"; "and your feet feeling all corns"; "and them blessed waggons a-blockin' the way."

The men are weary now. Weary; and faint from hunger.

Silence in the ranks! A mile ahead is the Waschbank Pass. Peradventure the Boers have cut across the country on those razor-backed ponies of theirs, and are lying in wait behind the boulders. Look at it—a steep hill on each side of the road. Now we are in the nek. "Silence there! If you want to curse, curse to yourself." In the blackness you can do nothing but think, and the only thing you can think of is what would happen if, with two well-directed shells, the mules hauling the front waggon were shot down at the head of the pass. Massacre—bloody, red massacre. If a hundred men got away that would be as much as could be expected. The waggons halt. What is it? No! it is not Boers, anyhow. The road is worse here. Before this it has been so bad that strong men have had to lift the waggons out of the mud—the mud that was axle-deep. Sometimes they have had to lift the mules also.

But here the mud is heartbreaking. Slowly the column winds itself into the pass. And then a waggon sticks. For the last hour the men have been dragging themselves along as men might walk in sleep—moving mechanically. But now the breakdown comes. As they perforce halt, they drop into the mud, absolutely unable to stand. The officers move amongst them. To no purpose. It is not "Will not," it is "Cannot." And so the poor fellows lie there; with no food, no covering; lie there in a bath of mud. They even sleep, some of them; sleep by companies and battalions.

After about three-quarters of an hour of this, the officers set to work to rouse them. "Up, Dublins!" "Now, Faugh-a-ballaghs!" "Will you let yourselves be

killed like rabbits?" "The enemy is not far behind. Let us get out into the open, where we can meet him like men!" And here and there a man rises, and kicks the man next to him, and exhorts him to bestir himself. The little rest has had some effect. Fusiliers and Rifles push to the front, drag mules and waggons out of the sticking-place, and the column goes ahead once more. The mules, being thereunto persuaded by sundry prods with bayonet and rifle, actually get up a trot; and, wonderful to tell, the men trot after them.

And the column moves sinuously forward. Neither crack of rifle nor buzz of shell breaks the peaceful silence of the night. The batteries lurch forward. Every ear strains for a sound; every eye peers intently into the blackness.

An hour later, Brigadier-General Yule is wiping from his forehead the drops of cold sweat. To risk your own life is something, but to feel yourself responsible for 3,500 men who will, if you have made a mistake, or if fortune is playing you false, be massacred to a man, without possibility of resistance, is a weight on a man's mind than which it is difficult to imagine a heavier.

But fortune favours the skilful. Tuesday morning found the retreating column by the Waschbank River, tired and hungry, but cheerful and still full of fight. They wade through the scanty stream, and halt. Who says the British soldier can only march on a full stomach?

Leaving the necessary men to guard the camp, the rest slept; but late in the morning the sound of guns was heard on their right front, a long way off. Yule had intended to resume his march that day, but, on hearing the guns, made sure that General White was coming out to his assistance. He therefore took with him his batteries and mounted infantry, leaving the rest of the force at the Waschbank River, and set out in the direction of the cannonade. He hoped to be in time to, at any rate, cut into the retreat of the Boers.

But the distance was too far. It would not have done to be caught in the hills in the dark, and so the undaunted general and his dauntless men rejoined their comrades in the evening. Another bivouac—comfortless, fireless, foodless. Not many men could have stood it. On Friday they had fought for ten hours without bite or sup. But to march for twenty-four hours on the same day is twenty times as hard. You have not the excitement to carry you on. Yet these 3,500 bore it unflinchingly and uncomplainingly. In fact, the Dublins made merry over their misfortunes. Only one thing grieved them, and that was that they had not had a fight, and were not likely to have one.

It had seemed almost like a gratuitous piece of cruelty to make the soldiers wade through the Waschbank River that Tuesday night. But after they had thrown themselves down to sleep—and sleep they did on the bare ground as soundly as ever sybarite slumbered in downiest bed—it began again to rain. Ye gods! how it rained!

"Oi've been for two years in this unhowly climit, an' Oi thought Oi knew rain whin Oi saw ut! But ov ahl the sanguinary showers Oi iver seen——!" So a private of the Dublins. He had the misfortune to be one of the pickets—a fair-haired lad from the Green Isle. Scatheless he had come through Friday's battle, though his "pal" had been shot dead before his eyes. And he thought in the lone watches of the night of his friend. His friend: one of those sent ahead of the

firing line on Talana's hillside to cut a barbed wire fence obstructing the advance. To perform this duty he must rise for a moment out of cover. He does so, and cuts the wire. But at that moment a bullet from the hill pierces his brain.

And now his fair-haired "pal," little more than a youth, sees the scene again. And his cold, tired fingers grip the rifle-stock fiercely as he thinks how he made two grim, bearded Boers pay for that life. "Why should I escape?" Why, indeed? Little did the lonely sentry think that, ere another month was over, he would be a maimed man, with only two fingers left on his right hand—the others carried away by the bursting of his own weapon. And the rain came down that night; but the tired men, soaked to the skin, slept through it all.

When morning broke, instead of the attenuated stream through which they had waded the night before, they found in their rear a rushing, torrential river. Lucky it was for them that the foresight of their general had insisted upon the column crossing the night before. For now the turbulent water was not fordable. It is not uncommon in South Africa for a puny brook, hardly sufficient to wet the feet at sunset, to become before sunrise a considerable river. This General Yule knew, and he provided accordingly.

As already mentioned, General Yule was

THE FAMOUS 4.7 GUN AT HOME: LOADING.
(Photo: Gregory & Co., Strand.)

off in the morning with his artillery and his mounted troops in the direction of the artillery fire on the west; but with his weary force he could not reach Sir George White. So he made back to the Waschbank, where he had left his infantry, and there remained until Wednesday morning. Then, his force being somewhat rested, though still hungry and without a dry rag to call its own, he made a move once more along the road to Ladysmith. It ought to be said that on the previous day he had established heliographic communication with White, so that the latter knew exactly where he was.

Between the bivouac-ground of Tuesday and the camp at Ladysmith there is a little river or stream known as Sunday's Spruit—some maps call it Sunday River. And here General Yule intended to pass the night of Wednesday. But as he arrived he was met by a party of cavalry from his chief, with peremptory orders to push on to Ladysmith that day. The distance was considerable — amounting, in fact, to a forced march. Nevertheless, Yule led his weary battalions along.

Here it was amusing to note the keenness of some of the Irish Fusiliers. They could hardly drag one foot along after the other. Yet it had somehow entered the heads of some of them that General White had sent to hurry them up because there was to be fighting in the town. This notion was as good as food and drink to them, and they stepped out at a rate quite alarming, cursing the mules whenever those unlucky beasts happened to stick with a waggon and delay the column.

It is instructive to compare the demeanour of the men of the four nations composing the Queen's regular army. The Welshman, fierce throughout, liable to fits of deep despondency and fiery fury; but full of honour, for every Taffy of them all thinks that the credit of the Principality is his to maintain. The Scotsman—"grim" is the only word. "A volcano covered with snow," as he has been described. He takes things pretty seriously, his fighting included. The Englishman—solid. He is rather more inclined for fun than his brother Sandy; but still, on the whole, he is phlegmatic. He will fight against odds, or lie in the rain for a week, or make a forced march, with little change of countenance.

And what of the Irishman? Is it not Pat who is the life and soul of the army? Send him to storm a position—he jokes all the way. Let Boer bullet stretch him on the ground — he shouts jests to more fortunate comrades. Under every possible state of circumstances he keeps a lightness of heart quite incomprehensible to those born and bred in the sister isle. Would a general have a brigade of Englishmen, or Scotsmen, or Welshmen, or Irishmen to fight for him, to storm a height or hold a position, he'll probably tell you to toss up for it. But if you ask him which of them he would select to endure accumulated miseries, he will almost certainly choose Paddy against all the world. None of the four will sink under stress of misfortune; but Pat is the boy to turn the whole thing into a joke. Not merely will he not grumble, but he will be sure to find a funny side to the business, out of which he will extract infinite jest.

What a wonderful thing is a strong sense of humour!

Yule's column was largely Irish, and these kept not only themselves but everybody else quite cheerful. "Shall there be a scrimmage waitin' at the other ind av this, now, sergeant?" "Av there is, 'tis we will frighten the beggars!" And he

was right. A most fearsome sight they looked: their khaki plastered thick with mud; mud in their hair; mud on their helmets; mud on their rifles; boots like one huge mud plaster.

Hullo! Who's this? Stand to your arms, men. With alacrity the men obey. But it is no enemy. It is a detachment of British infantry, the Manchesters, marching out to meet them and escort them into Ladysmith. There is water in their water-bottles. Their haversacks carry rations. And the hungry men of the Dundee column have a bit and a sup as far as the provision goes. This they do marching. But the long forced journey is beginning to tell its tale, and the soldiers can only just drag their weary limbs along. Did the enemy appear now, it is quite certain there would be a fight, for our men simply could not run away if they wanted to.

And so they crawl on, till Ladysmith comes in sight. Even now some of them are beginning to drop by the roadside—asleep even before they touch the ground. They have fallen asleep while walking. Up, there! We are nearly at the camp! And the slumbers are cut short, and again the men dawdle along, by this time having lost all pretence of rank and formation. Even Pat can no longer joke, being nearly asleep.

Every journey must end, however; and after what seems an eternity, the column's head files, or scrambles, into Ladysmith. Then a strange thing happens. The men drop in the streets of the town, and sleep a sleep as of the dead; neither will any force or any persuasion induce them to go to the quarters that have been made ready for them. Until dawn they lie—3,000 men—in Ladysmith streets.

But when the muster-roll is called next day not a single man who set out from Dundee is missing. And for all the exposure and forced marching, after breakfast not one of them seems anything but fit and well, though General Yule had to be invalided home immediately, broken down by bodily fatigue and mental anxiety.

They had left behind at Dundee all their wounded, their hospital, and their appliances and medicines for sick and wounded; numbers of rifles, and food in large quantities; bayonets, too, a few. There is no doubt the Boers found the food stores uncommonly useful. A great deal of it was tinned meat of various kinds; and this might all have been destroyed by General Yule by the simple process of driving the point of a pick into every tin. But he feared to take this course, because the secrecy of his movement would have been destroyed from the moment he gave the order. It would have been apparent at once that there was to be a retreat and an abandonment of the position; and a word from a disaffected townsman to the Boer commandant would have brought on disaster.

Yule succeeded magnificently. But the bravest man in that force still shudders to think what might have happened had 100 Boer riflemen opened fire at Waschbank Pass on the Dundee column.

CHAPTER X.

HOW WHITE SAVED THE DUNDEE COLUMN—THE RECONNAISSANCE OF RIETFONTEIN.

IT has been said that when Yule's force was encamped, on the 24th of October, on the side of the Waschbank River, they heard the sound of White's guns.

Let us see what it was General White was doing.

We left him on Sunday evening in Ladysmith, resting the men and tending the wounded who had been at Elandslaagte the day before. Here he received a message from General Yule, with the information that Dundee was to be abandoned, and the force there to retire on Ladysmith by the Helpmakaar Road.

Now General White knew that 9,000 Boers were at Bester's (see Map, p. 5), and that these, on hearing from Dundee of the retreat of Yule's column, would probably send a party out to cut him off before he could join hands with White. This could well enough be done by such a mobile force. All they had to do was to trot across country from west to east, crossing the Newcastle Road and railway line a few miles north of Ladysmith, and drop on the flank of Yule's column at, say, Sunday River—or make an attack on them at their night bivouac.

The Boer commander at Bester's did exactly what Sir George White expected him to do. Hearing of the retreat of Yule's column, he detached a strong force, who slipped to Jonono's Kop, a hill north of Ladysmith about twelve miles. But White's scouts, the tireless, restless Imperial Light Horse, were scouring the country looking for them. Back posted the scouts, and on Tuesday morning General White moved up the Newcastle Road to say "Check!" to the Dutchmen's move.

General French took the cavalry—part of the 5th Lancers, part of the 19th Hussars, and a company of the Natal Mounted Volunteers, together with some of the Imperials—and with these he went forward towards Jonono's Kop. Following the cavalry was an infantry brigade under Colonel Ian Hamilton, the same who had distinguished himself on the Saturday. The infantry included the 2nd Battalion King's Royal Rifles (the 1st Batt. K.R.R. was with Yule), the 1st Devons, the 1st Gloucesters, and the 1st Liverpools. The 10th Mountain Battery and the 42nd and 53rd Field Batteries accompanied Colonel Hamilton. Of these troops only the Devons, the Lancers, the 42nd Battery, and the Imperials had been at the Elandslaagte fight. The others were fresh troops who had not yet been under fire in the war.

Before breakfast they found the enemy. For a wonder it was not the Imperials. It was the Hussars and the Rifles who first exchanged shots with the foe. The Rifle regiments make it their business to go in for skirmishing a great deal, and the King's Royal Rifles were spread out wide—one man to about twenty yards—when they espied a party of Boers riding along. "Let's have a pop at them!" was the cry; and soon the crack of our rifles was heard

Now these Boers were old, country Boers—not, like the Elandslaagte contingent, containing foreigners or townsmen. They soon got to cover, and in quick time their rifles, too, rang out. No damage was done ; and the King's Royals rejoined the Hussars and went for another look round.

The Imperials soon saw them, rode up, dismounted, and made for the top of that ridge. Up they swarmed, from stone to stone, from mound to mound, using their carbines whenever there was half a chance. Suddenly a couple of shells dropped over them, hurled from a big gun on the kop.

THE CAMP OF THE DEVONS AT LADYSMITH.

The Imperials were not long out of the fray.

The Boers had posted themselves on two pretty considerable hills, one called Mattowana's Kop, and the other Tinta Inyoni—the two being connected by a nek. This, as you may have noticed, was a favourite Boer position—the one they adopted at Talana and Elandslaagte. In front of the kop is a not very high ridge ; and on this ridge a few Boers had posted themselves.

They must have been wonderful gunners, those Boers, for two minutes after the same big gun was slewed round, shelling our artillery in quite another direction.

It must be remembered that the British general's intention was simply to hold the enemy in check—to prevent him from crossing the road and railway, and so to stop him from falling on Yule's column. To use a homely sporting simile, it was like two forwards at football—one dribbles

RIETFONTEIN: HELPING A WOUNDED COMRADE.

the ball, and when the opposing back comes to charge him, the other forward receives the weight of the charge, in order that his companion may dribble on uninterrupted.

It was, therefore, no part of the British game that day to attack, except so far as was necessary to give the Boers something to do. And it would, in the circumstances, be quite sufficient to capture the ridge in front of the two hills, to hold it, and from it to rain shot and shell on the foe without attempting to storm the Boer position. That, then, was General White's plan.

And in order to accomplish it, he sent forward the King's Royal Rifles to crawl up the right side of the ridge, and the Liverpools and Gloucesters on the left, with the Devons in support of them. Meanwhile the Imperials kept crawling up, crawling up. They still remembered Scott-Chisholme. Fresh in their minds were the sufferings of their women and children on the terrible flight from the Rand. And had not these Dutchmen taunted them with the failure of Jameson's Raid and called them cowards? They would show them whether they were cowards or no.

Warily! Be careful! Don't show too much of yourself, or you are a dead man. Gad! What was that lump of lead that struck the stone close by? No Mauser bullet, that! It must be an old Martini that the fellow is firing! He fires straight enough, anyhow.

Ugh! A leaden splash draws blood from a man's cheek. He will carry the scar to his grave. But he does not halt. The warm blood trickling down his chin only seems to make him steadier, quieter, more vicious. Crawl up! Let them have your carbines, boys. And here are some Hussars crawling up, too! This isn't your job, my light cavalrymen. Still, you are welcome. We Colonials will show you how to crawl up hills with your spurs on.

Now! All together! Hooray! "Give 'em the butt-end, boys!"

They don't wait for the butt-end! They are off into the valley between the ridge and the hills, where they soon find stones and little earth mounds to cover them.

Warily the Imperials follow, and again the Dutchmen do not wait for the butt-end. They scamper up the kop to rejoin the main body of their comrades. But what is that? Bullets whistle and shriek, scraps of iron hurtle through the air. A dozen Dutchmen drop. Their comrades, brave fellows! pick them up in their arms and run for the camp. It is the 53rd Battery, which has galloped fiercely to the crest of the ridge, and is throwing shrapnel over the valley, scattering lead on the hillside. And the fierce Imperials rejoice. For although the guns reap the harvest of destruction, it is they who have prepared the ground.

The Boer guns—the big one first mentioned and another more modern weapon, a quick-firer—engage in a sharp duel with our batteries. But what are two guns against fourteen—and fourteen handled as ours are handled? Their big gun drops a shell hard by where Sir George White stands with his staff; and the quick-firer drops another amongst our artillery. Like lightning the men of the R.A. wheel into position. "Train her for that beastly quick-firer!" That is not a very long job. "That's what I call good practice," remarks a subaltern, very much pleased with himself.

And he is right. The very first shell from the 10th Mountain Battery drops with beautiful precision right on the Boer quick-firer. There is one danger the less

for our infantry and cavalry; for the gun is knocked over, and cannot, apparently, be set up again during the day. Now for the big chap. The big chap, with slow deliberation, casts into our midst another shell. "Holy Moses! what a smoke!" Twenty years ago one expected a smoke when big guns were fired. Now there is none; and that makes it all the more difficult for the other side to find out where your artillery is. He can only watch for the flash and try to locate that.

Hence an Irish gunner at the mountain gun is constrained to make the observation recorded above. "Oi'm blowed if th' idjit isn't usin' black powther!" "A little to the left, gunner! That's all right. Now!" Bbmme! Rhhr! A shell sails up the kop. "Good business, lieutenant! I think we'll give them another of those."

The mountain gun, and then the other mountain gun, with breathless rapidity pitch shell after shell over, round, and in front of the big chap. "I don't fancy they'll stand much more of it." And the captain is right. The old-fashioned fellow who consumes old-fashioned gunpowder is not vigorous enough for his young rivals who deal in cordite. The Boer gunners cannot handle him. He takes such a long time to load; and then—those fellows are so persistent with their shrapnel.

And the big chap presently ceases to bellow angrily back to the bark! bark! bark! of the mountain guns below. Hardy farmers and farmers' sons drag and pull him out of the way. And now the Boers have only their rifles to trust to.

The mountain guns and the 53rd Battery were playing on Mattowana's Kop; the 42nd Battery threw shrapnel at Tinta Inyoni; the Rifles and the Devons and Gloucesters had seized little kopjes along the ridge and were answering the enemy's rifle fire. This was pretty much what General White wanted—just to prevent the commandoes from getting any farther.

Then suddenly he saw a party of men galloping swiftly to the south. What: trying to get on our flank, are they? One sees at once the value of mounted men. A party of infantry would have been no good in a case like this. Long ere they could have been on the spot to stop the movement the Boers would have been well on our flank—advancing from cover to cover, and treating us to a warm fire from the side.

Luckily, we have some men who can gallop also. A word—and the Natal Volunteer Mounted Infantry dash off, their Maxims rattling with them. Round the little farmstead of Rietfontein* they go—up the valley—ah! there they are, about sixty of them. Trying to turn our flank. Dashing up within range, the Natal men give the Dutchmen just about their very warmest time that day. The deadly toy gun—(it looks so like a toy gun; you work it by grasping a handle)—pops and pops and scatters leaden death. The sixty have soon had enough of it. They have lost half their number in killed and wounded, and they retire—turning round to shoot every now and then. The Volunteers, after this, receive a good deal of attention from the Boers on the hill; but they hold their ground well—take cover, and fire at the rifle flashes.

The work is slow enough in all conscience, save for the first smart dash of the Imperials when they took the ridge, and this little isolated skirmish of the Natalians. The only people who seem to be enjoying themselves are the gunners. True, they cannot see the foe, but they are used to firing at about a couple of

* From this farm the skirmish took its name.

RIETFONTEIN: ARTILLERY IN ACTION.

miles. The Rifles and the infantry, however, find it slow. Not a solitary Boer is now to be seen. You can see, sometimes, the flash of a rifle. Sometimes you can see black smoke; for some of these old-fashioned farmers prefer Martini and gunpowder to Mauser and melinite, or any other fancy explosive. But though you know they are there, not one of them can you see.

It is not that the distance is too great. Let but the tip of a Rifleman's elbow be shown outside the stone behind which he has taken cover; let but a single Liverpool private exhibit the fraction of a helmet above the crest of the ridge, and instantly a dozen bullets fly round the elbow, a score skim the top of the helmet.

The art of fighting at long range in these regions, Mr. Atkins, is to be able to choose your cover so that you can see perfectly well but cannot be seen at all. Those farmers and sportsmen on the top of Tinta Inyoni, the descendants of generations of big-game hunters, acquired the art when they were ten years old—if, indeed, they did not inherit it. And if you want to meet these men with a reasonable chance of success, Mr. Atkins, you must learn it somehow. You will learn it some day. Then—and not till then—let these rustics beware. For they are no match for you at close fighting. Only you must learn that art of taking cover, or else you'll never get to close quarters.

It is a hard lesson to learn.

See! There are the Gloucesters learning it now. Some of them do not live to benefit by the lesson.

The orders were as plain as could be: Occupy the crest of the ridge in front of the enemy's position, and remain there. There you will have plenty of cover; and from it you can make play with your rifles while the mountain guns and field batteries keep a hail of shell flying over the valley.

But the Gloucesters blundered. Why, or how, nobody knows, and nobody ever will know. But blunder they certainly did. Instead of keeping to the friendly shelter of the ridge, they, just before noon, advanced over the crest. Instantly the massacre began. Every single Boer rifle was turned on the devoted battalion. Cover, of course, there was none—could be none when they were on the slope of the ridge nearest to the Boer hills. A Martini bullet shatters the shinbone of a private—these Martini bullets do not make nice, clean little holes as the Mausers and Lee-Metfords do. They spread as they hit; they are much heavier, and made of lead without a hard outer case of steel or nickel.

Fiercely the Devons and the King's Royal Rifles reply to the firing from the hill-top, trying to keep down the Dutchmen's fire. To what end? They can see no one to shoot at—only fire volley after volley at the stones from behind which the rifle flashes came. This is a bad business. Now, 53rd Battery! Let them have it! Ah! that's better. The rifle-fire slackens a little, and the maimed and battered battalion retreats to its proper place behind the crest. The colonel—Lieutenant-Colonel Welford—is brought in dead. And that is why no one will ever know why those brave fellows were led out to be shot at. Let us hope, for the dead man's sake, that he mistook an order. This is not the time for blame or praise. He has died a soldier's death, at the head of his men, his face to the foe.

For an hour after this rifles blazed and cannon boomed, and hundredweights of

lead sped across from ridge to hill, from hill to ridge. The noonday sun shone brightly down. After some four hours' firing, the British general decided to withdraw. He had received a message from General Yule which assured him that the Dundee column was now too near to Ladysmith to be cut off. It might have been possible, of course, with his superior artillery, for Sir George White to drive the enemy out of their position. But the game would have been too expensive. Even had his infantry reached Mattowana's Kop and Tinta Inyoni, the Boers would not have waited for him.

As I said before, these were old Boers, who regarded the proceedings of Kock's contingent at Elandslaagte with the greatest possible contempt. The idea of riflemen waiting to receive at close quarters infantry armed with the bayonet was to these men ridiculous. Shoot them while they are struggling up to your position. Use your rifle as long as you can. But if you find the *rooinek* getting to close quarters, in the name of reason do not wait to be prodded by the knife he carries on the end of his gun. Call up your horses from the rear, leave a few men behind to keep up the firing to the last, and let your main body ride away. The rearguard can die or surrender, according to its individual taste and fancy.

These were the old Boer tactics, possible, and only possible because he had not a footman in his ranks. The mounted infantry, even if they could not outdistance cavalry sent to pursue them—and this they could do easily on broken ground—were never so badly broken but that they could render a pretty good account of themselves. To "run away," and "live to fight another day," as the old sarcastic couplet has it, was the simplest of simple good sense to the Boer burgher. To retreat merely meant that he was saving himself for another occasion.

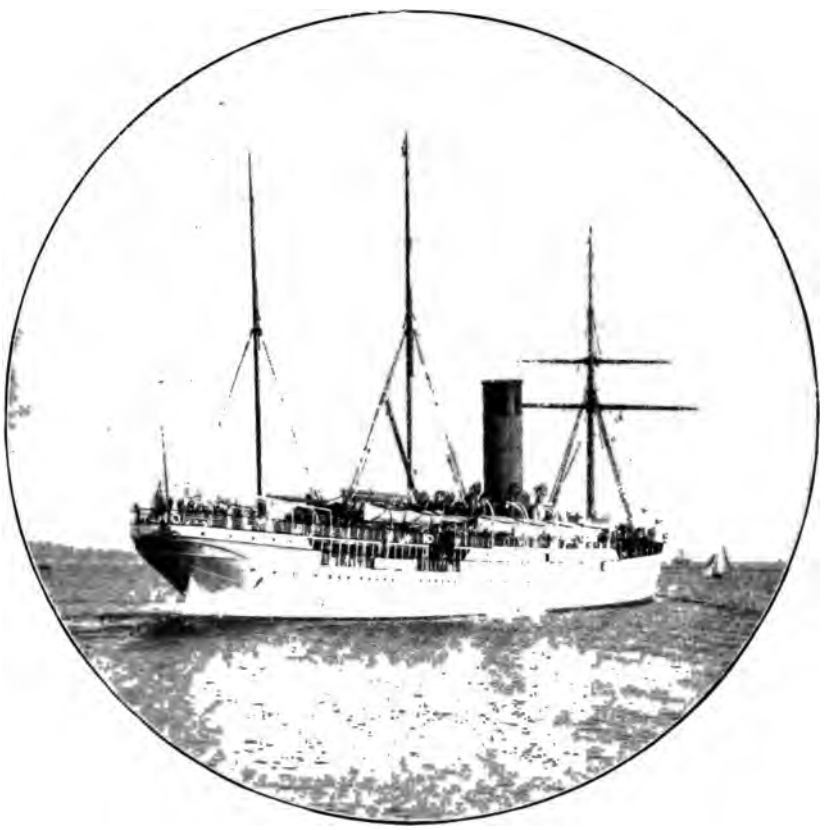
This time, however, Sir George White, with much wisdom and self-control, refrained from wasting his incomparable infantry on the useless storming of positions almost impregnable. Instead, having done what he had set himself to do, having held the enemy in check and saved Yule's column, he decided to retire to Ladysmith. "Battle at Rietfontein! Retreat of the British to Ladysmith!" would not figure so bravely on the contents bills of the evening papers, or lend itself so well to flaming bulletins from the seat of war, as "Battle at Rietfontein! The British carry the heights with the bayonet!" All the same, there was not a piece of work attempted or accomplished in that campaign more useful than the fight at Tinta Inyoni.

The guns covered the retirement in masterly fashion. The riflemen on the hills, whose fire had been somewhat quelled by the death-dealing shrapnel, soon got to work again when they saw the men in khaki moving off. But the mountain guns and the field batteries kept them at bay; and such was the wholesome respect inspired by our gunners, that the Dutchmen never even attempted to pursue the retiring force.

It had been a stubborn enough affair while it lasted. Our men suffered very little; and need not have lost even so much as they did had it not been for the mistake of the Gloucesters. As it was, Colonel Welford was the only officer killed. Eleven men shared the same fate; and 103 of all ranks were wounded and two men missing. Of the wounded, four were officers in the artillery.

In the best of spirits, singing cheerfully

and quite pleased with itself, the little force marched south down the Newcastle —Ladysmith road. And as they marched, an irrepressible Hussar called out to one of the Field Artillery gunners, "This has been *your* day out." And the contemplative gunner sucked his pipe in silence for a second. Then, indicating with his thumb over his shoulder the hills to the north, he observed, "We're satisfied, if they are." And with much contentment he resumed his cutty.



DEPARTURE OF THE *TANTALLON CASTLE* FOR SOUTH AFRICA, WITH SIR GEORGE WHITE AND STAFF.
(Photo: W. Gregory & Co., Strand, W.C.)

4.7-IN. GUN ON TEMPORARY PLATFORM.

CHAPTER XI.

HOW WHITE SALLIED OUT—AND SOMETHING OF 4.7.

WHILE General Yule was hastening for Ladysmith, from Sunday the 22nd to Thursday the 26th of October, the Boers were hastening there also in three, if not four, columns. Their objects were—first, to cut off the retreating column before it could join its strength to General White's; second, to hit General White before he could receive reinforcements; third, to get behind Ladysmith, break up the railway, and so cut White's line of communications.

The value of "cutting the line of communications" is very great from a military point of view. By "line of communications" one means the line—whether road, rail, or river—along which the army receives supplies of food, forage, and ammunition; by which it sends away its wounded and prisoners; and by which it can receive reinforcements. Thus, if we can suppose an enemy in the county of Durham, with our army at York, our lines of communications would be three—viz. from York to Liverpool on the west, to Hull on the east, and to London on the south. And if the foe could take possession of points between York and those three places, the lines would be broken.

When a force is cut off in this way, it requires no military skill to see that it is at a great disadvantage; because it cannot replace the men killed, or the ammunition expended, or the food and forage consumed.

Now, as I explained in Ch. III., p. 29, General White's line of communication with Durban—his nearest seaport—was by the railway over the Tugela River, through Colenso, Estcourt, and Pietermaritzburg. At all these places he had a small force—far too small a force, in fact, to hold such a long line, considering that the enemy could easily make an attack from either east or west.

On Friday (October 27) the main body of Boers, under General Joubert, was within twelve miles of Ladysmith, and from that time began to close in on the town. They

had brought with them some very heavy artillery—much heavier than is usually carried about by an army, and by Saturday night they had seized a hill, called Pepworth Hill, about 7,500 to 8,000 yards north of the outermost batteries of the garrison. Having driven Yule from Dundee, they had reoccupied Elandslaagte, and held the railway from Pretoria close to Ladysmith. This enabled them to bring up great siege guns. Now, if General White had had in the town any guns of position he could have stopped this. He could, from his positions, have shelled Pepworth Hill to such an extent that the Boers would have been unable to hold it—much less to place guns there.

He ought to have had those guns. To place a general in that position without the heavy long-range guns, by which he could reply to the enemy's fire, was about as sane as it would be to send a man with a walking-stick to fight a duel with one who carried a revolver and a sword; or a man with a revolver carrying forty yards to shoot against another with a Lee-Metford rifle. You see, the Boers could plant themselves 8,000 yards away and plump shells into Ladysmith, while the Ladysmith guns could only shoot to within a mile and a half of them!

Quite comfortably, therefore, the Boers took possession of Pepworth Hill and began to make an emplacement for a big gun. For one of these weapons needs a properly constructed bed to fire from. It is not like a field gun—fired from a gun-carriage. The recoil is so tremendous that you must place the machine in some place where it cannot topple over by the force of its own discharge. And all day on Sunday, ignoring their usual Sabbatarian rule, the Boers worked away, placing their guns, that they had somehow dragged up, where they could be most useful.

The British commander was not idle. His men had been working for a long time to put Ladysmith into a complete state of defence. But Sir George White, an enterprising soldier, trained under Roberts in India, did not intend to be surrounded and invested in the town if he could help it. So his scouts scoured the country, and brought in the information that the Boers appeared to be in three main bodies—one, under Joubert (the largest), occupied Pepworth Hill to the north; a second menaced the road from Ladysmith to Colenso—it was not on that road, but was to the north-west of it; a third, being the main body of Lucas Meyer's contingent, which had retreated from Talana, with a strong reinforcement received afterwards from General Erasmus, was at Farquhar's Farm, a hilly place on the north-east; and there was a smaller contingent under Viljoen at Nicholson's Nek, on the north and slightly west (see Map, p. 95).

Altogether, the enemy numbered from 13,000 (their own account) to 20,000 (the British account); while General White had some 9,000 men actually in fighting trim. And it seemed good to the British commander, therefore, to strike first at one of the enemy's commandoes—cripple that one; then turn on the second and smash it, and finally give battle to the Free Staters. He made only one mistake. That was, he miscalculated the size and effectiveness of Meyer's force. He thought, as did every other officer, that the Vryheid commando had been so smashed and demoralised by their defeat at Talana as to be of little account as a fighting body. But win or lose, he would detain the Boers long enough to allow another train or two to get through from and to Durban.

Little did he know the enemy with whom he had to deal. Meyer, finding the British artillery fire too hot, and that the British rifleman was not the wildly bad shot that he had supposed; seeing the infantry creeping steadily up the hill, unmoment the other contingent from Bester's should attack. The last-named contingent being held up at Rietfontein, Meyer had simply marched over to the hills on the north-east of White's camp, whence he practically commanded the road to Colenso

GENERAL SIR GEORGE WHITE.
(Photo: Bourne & Shepherd, Calcutta.)

dismayed by the fire of his marksmen—seeing these things, he had not waited to be annihilated, but had retreated in good order with nearly all his force, leaving a devoted rearguard to continue the defence until he should have got away. That very night he had joined forces with Joubert; and when Yule evacuated Dundee, it was Meyer who followed him with an augmented force, ready to fall on his rear the from the east and threatened the right rear of the British force. The headquarters of Lucas Meyer were at a place known as Farquhar's Farm—a name soon a household word, as being that of the place where the British forces in Natal met with their first repulse. It is about five miles from Ladysmith.

On the Friday (27th) French had been out with his cavalry, reconnoitring, and

found Meyer busy entrenching himself and resting his forces after their fruitless march in pursuit of Yule. A mixed force of infantry, under that tireless man and soldierly officer, Colonel Ian Hamilton, was with French—a force of about 1,500, marching light.

Now the Farquhar's Farm position, being hilly, was one of some difficulty; and the theory laid down in books on tactics, and apparently dictated by sound sense, says that the best and cheapest way to deliver an infantry attack on such a position is to rush it in the night. You may surprise the enemy, and at all events you deprive him of any advantages of superior shooting. A bad shot is just as likely as a good one to hit you in the dark. And so Generals White and French resolved that Hamilton should halt his infantry within a couple of miles (but out of sight) of the Boer position, and at about two in the morning should try to rush it.

But probably the Boers knew of the position of Hamilton's column. It looked like it, at all events; and it also looked as though they expected an immediate attack. For more of White's scouts reported that large reinforcements were making their way to Meyer. Consequently the general changed his plans, recalled Hamilton to camp, and the projected night attack was never made.

This change of plans, however, by no means meant that the British commander was content to sit down quietly without making some attempt to break the line now being gradually drawn round him. It was merely this: that, instead of an isolated rush at one part, he had resolved to attack in two places, delivering his main assault in the centre, on Pepworth Hill.

So on Sunday night the force stood to arms. It was to be an infantry attack; and once more Ian Hamilton was entrusted with the main battle. He marched out in the night with three battalions of infantry, the Imperial Light Horse, and three batteries of artillery. His infantry brigade was made up exactly as at Elandslaagte—the 2nd Gordon Highlanders, the 1st Devons, and the Manchesters. It was no light task to undertake.

To begin with, the attacking force was smaller than that on the defensive. Now it is calculated by experts that to attack a position of strength held by an enemy armed with modern weapons of precision you ought to outnumber them by three to one. But our soldiers at Dundee had shown that there might be exceptions to the rule, for there the actual attacking force was far less than the defenders. And there is no doubt that General White, in ordering the attack on Pepworth Hill, was relying upon the superior quality of his infantry to counterbalance his inferiority in numbers and position.

But there was not only a disparity in numbers—there was another, far more serious, and this was enough to differentiate the case from the battle of Talana Hill. There, Symons started to assault an entrenched position, with inferior numbers, it is true; but in another arm he had a great and decided advantage. I mean in the artillery arm. It is doubtful whether, with all their wonderful dash and courage, the Rifles and Fusiliers would have been able to storm Talana had it not been for the fact that our field batteries were able to silence the Boer artillery and afterwards to pour shrapnel into the trenches.

Here the case was quite different. So far from our having a decisive superiority in our artillery, we were decidedly inferior. They had guns equal to our own, and some

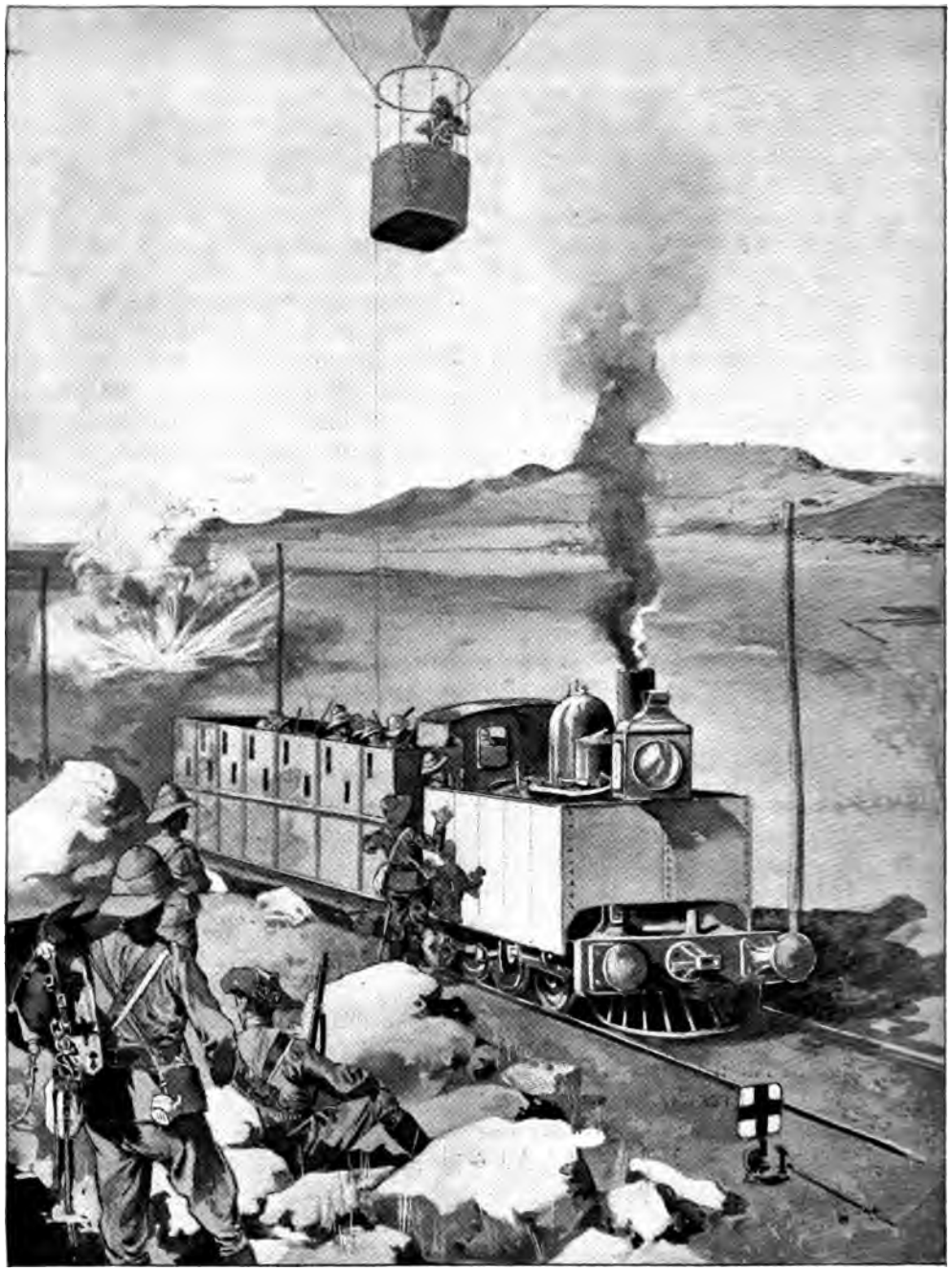
superior. And had it not been for the pluck of our gunners in venturing well within the Boer range the disaster to our forces must have been enormous. As it was, the artillery saved the day. Even then it would have gone hard with the Ladysmith garrison had it not been for the arrival of certain reinforcements, to be spoken of later.

Hamilton, then, was to make the main assault, and to endeavour to drive the enemy from Pepworth Hill, and so smash him in the centre. But, of course, this was only dealing with one part of the enemy. There was also Lucas Meyer's contingent to be reckoned with. This must be held in check, or else while Hamilton was attacking Joubert, Meyer would attack him in the rear or right flank. Wherefore, in order to prevent the Vryheid contingent doing any damage to Hamilton's brigade, another brigade went out towards Farquhar's Farm for the purpose of giving Meyer something to do on his own account. Colonel Grimwood took command, having under him the 1st Battalion of the King's Royal Rifles, now fresh and fit after their journey of the previous week; the 2nd King's Royal Rifles; the 2nd Dublin Fusiliers and 2nd Leicesters, also of the old Dundee column, and the 1st Battalion of the Liverpool Regiment. He also had three batteries of Field Artillery, as well as some Natal Volunteer Artillery.

And where was French, that wily cavalry man? What was he doing when all this fighting was to the fore? He was out far on the right—that is, on the right of Grimwood (who was on the right of Hamilton)—with the 5th Lancers, some of the 19th Hussars, and those of the 18th Hussars who had not found their way to Pretoria, besides a few volunteer cavalry troops. In fact, he had all the cavalry available at this point. The reason for putting him here was that General White thought it just possible that the Boers might make some swift movement round and try to get on Grimwood's flank. Wherefore the most mobile part of our own force was detached to stop them if they should make the attempt.

So much for the right and centre of the British force. Now for the left. It was known that some Boers—Free Staters—were on the British left, up among the hills. How many there were was not known, but the scouts, the "eyes and ears" of the army, reported that they were few in number, and were to be found at a point towards the Van Reenen Road—a road which runs from the Colenso Road through Van Reenen's Pass (the principal pass) into the Free State towards Harrismith. Some notice had, of course, to be taken of this contingent, otherwise it might have turned up at an awkward moment on the left of Hamilton. But the information to hand seemed to show that a very small body would be enough to deal with this commando.

So there left Ladysmith—marching to the north-west—at half-past ten on Sunday night, a small column of infantry and artillery. The artillery was one mountain battery, the 10th, the same that had shown its quality a few days before at Rietfontein. Half the battalion of the Gloucesters, who had suffered so severely in the same engagement, together with half a battalion of Royal Irish Fusiliers, composed the infantry force. And it ought particularly to be noticed that no one amongst the British commanders ever expected this column to have any trouble in dealing with the enemy it was sent to meet. It was, in fact, sent out quite as much in order that it might march round



ARMOURED TRAIN AND WAR BALLOON OUTSIDE LADYSMITH.

to the right of the Boer position at Pepworth and assist Hamilton by making a flank attack as for any other reason. Colonel Carleton was in command.

How it had its hands quite full enough of its own business, of its terrible experiences, and the fate that ultimately befell Carleton's column, shall be told in another chapter. We will now return to the main battle.

At midnight Hamilton's force marched out of Ladysmith, so as to be able to make an attack with the daylight; and Colonel Grimwood's force set out at the same time, leaving the cavalry to follow a few hours later. At three o'clock in the morning, before the centre division had set out for the attack on Pepworth Ridge, a train arrived in Ladysmith. Immediately there was a buzz in the camp, for out of the train poured men in khaki, the stalwart lads of the 2nd Battalion Rifle Brigade. General White might well have kept this force in Ladysmith as a reserve; but he did not. Instead, he sent it out at once as a reinforcement to his central attack; and Ian Hamilton's men extended a warm welcome to these comrades who arrived so opportunely. For every man recognised that even now the brigade was quite small enough for the work that lay before it. And it ought to be said that some men, including a couple of companies of the Dublins, had to be kept behind to guard the town—a sort of skeleton defence.

At daybreak, or rather just before it, the Devons, Manchesters, and Gordons started in earnest to attack the ridge on the north. They were led with great skill, and managed to get within rifle range before Joubert knew what they were doing. They had to climb hill after hill, kopje after kopje, before reaching the commanding ridge that they had come out to take. And up they swarmed—in loose order—not the compact, wall-like mass we are accustomed to associate with the term "line," but a straggly looking crowd. To give the Boers a mass of men to shoot at would have been rank folly; but the finest shots in the world cannot make very good practice at single men, when the men are 600 yards away. Within 600 yards the case is different.

A great deal of nonsense has been written about shooting with modern rifles. We know perfectly well that a Mauser bullet has wounded a man at a distance of 3,000 yards—more than a mile and a half. But it is of no use to pretend that the man who fired that shot aimed at the man he hit. In all human probability he never so much as saw him. Imagine yourself trying to see a man at a mile and a half—that man being dressed in clothes of the same colour as the earth around him! Of course, if you have a line of men half a mile in length, and marching in close order, you give the enemy a target half a mile wide, and he is bound to hit somebody, even at a mile and a half, if he can only get the right elevation.

But when the rifleman has to aim at a particular man, as he must do when the enemy is spread out wide, the only effective rifle shooting is done at from 100 to 600 yards. Remember that. Here and there you may find a man who is certain death at 1,000 or 1,200; and probably you will find him more often amongst a force of Transvaal Boers than anywhere else. But that man is a rarity; and even he can only be sure of hitting his mark when the mark remained steady after the trigger is pulled; or, if moving, moves at the same rate of speed in the same direction. Omitting this, it is more by chance than

skill that a single man is shot down at very long range.

On this occasion, therefore, by keeping his men loose, Hamilton had really little difficulty in gaining the lower hills, preparatory to attacking the main position. The infantry spread itself out ; and when daylight came, crawled onwards, by half-companies—that is, half a company crept forward to some cover pointed out to them. Lying behind this, they fired at the enemy's position—at the position, because they could not see anything else to fire at. Then another half company advanced, to the right or left of the first one, and started firing as soon as cover was reached. Then another, and another, until at last every man is again in line—a loose, skirmishing line.

Now they all lie down and blaze away at the rocks on the ridge, not so much hoping to hit the enemy as hoping to frighten him. That is, by keeping up a hail of bullets at the ridge they hoped to confine the enemy behind his boulders and entrenchments, to make him afraid to leave his cover for an instant. As a rule, a man has to leave cover more or less—if a Boer, usually less—to be able to fire. If he is behind an earthwork or a big stone, he cannot easily see what to fire at. He must peep round, or over, to get a sight.

All went well with Hamilton. He pushed the enemy farther and farther back, when at five o'clock (a.m.) a tremendous report rang out. It was a big Boer gun from Pepworth, throwing its first shell. And where? Not into the advancing infantry at all, but into Ladysmith. For a buzzing noise was heard in that devoted town, a huge mass of iron dropped, a tremendous explosion in the street—it was the first bombardment of Ladysmith. Luckily, that big fellow took some time to load and train. He could not speak often, but every now and then he raised his voice, like a giant's cough ; and every time a shell dropped into Ladysmith.

There was other artillery on the ridge at Pepworth, too—guns in the nature of field artillery. And while their gigantic comrade devoted his cumbersome attentions to the town, these did their best to afford the British infantry a warm reception. You may rest assured that the same infantry was not at all sorry that the Boer gunners were unable to find him for some time ; but at last they found him, and let him have shrapnel in such quantities that had one bullet (a shrapnel shell is a case filled with bullets, as we know) in a couple of thousand found its billet the Gordons, the Rifle Brigade, the Manchesters, and the Devons would have been massacred. Fortunately, shell-fire has more bark than bite under circumstances like these. It is good enough to mow down a thick column, or to pitch into a cluster of men—as, for instance, into a knot of men working at a gun ; but against infantry crawling along in skirmishing order it has not much more effect than a popgun or a charge of small-shot.

Wherefore the Devons crept stolidly on, regardless of the lead storm overhead, and the Gordons vowed they cared not a bodle, and the men from Manchester smiled in their superior way and pressed on. Hamilton's batteries had not been idle. From behind the crest of a ridge some 4,500 yards in front of the Boer battery of field guns, they pitched shell after shell at Pepworth Hill and the battery in front of it. They were using cordite, which gives no smoke, and the crest concealed the flash of the fire from the enemy. So that the Dutch cannoneers were quite unable

to tell where the shells came from, and consequently were unable to reply. To do them credit, they did not try, but continued to shell the advancing infantry.

Then the artillery did something heroic. They deliberately tried to divert the enemy's fire from the battalions to themguns have a range of only 4,500 yards, and it soon became apparent that although they could, from their position, deal effectively with the nearer battery, they could not touch the heavier metal on the hill behind.

"There's only one thing to do. If we

TWELVE-POUNDER NAVAL GUN AND GUNNERS.

selves. And to do it they came right on to the crest of the ridge where they could be plainly seen. The manœuvre succeeded. Hardly had they unlimbered in their new position when the battery on Pepworth Hill and the lighter guns on the ridge in front opened on them, giving Hamilton's men a chance to rush forward at greater speed.

As we have said before, the British field are to silence those big beggars we must get nearer in," was their conclusion.

Have you ever seen a boxing match between a long-armed man and a boxer with a short reach? If the long-limbed one can keep the other at arm's length, he must get the best of it. The other can only have a chance if he is able to come to close fighting. Then, provided he can deliver a few powerful blows at close

quarters, he may discount the other's natural advantage. But, as any boxer will bear witness, the little man runs the risk of heavy punishment while he is making his rush to get inside. So it was here. One battery remained on the ridge and hurled death and destruction with extraordinary precision into the southern battery opposed to them.

To the other two comes the order "Limber up!" It is done like a conjuring trick. The limber with the horses is attached to every gun.

"Forward!"

Away they gallop along and down the ridge. The movement is so sudden that it disconcerts the gunners on the hill. The drivers lash the horses and drag the cumbrous machines at the gallop over everything, down a steep declivity, up a sharp ascent, over great stones and rough ground. A horse is down with its back broken. Cut the traces and away. For a thousand yards they gallop, like a nightmare steeplechase. It is like a swarm of four-in-hands with drivers mad drunk, running a race down Scafell. And before the Dutchmen have sufficiently collected their wits to train their guns anew—"Unlimber!" Another conjuring trick. "Load! ready! fire!" and a shell drops fairly on the hill.

Which is one way to make little guns equal to big guns.

Crash! The 42nd Battery is in action. We have them this time; for unless we are mistaken that shot reached Pepworth Hill. Let them have another. Three thousand is the range. And in ten minutes the twelve guns are all booming and bellowing at once. It is a one-sided affair at first, because the Boers have not yet got our distance.

They soon find it. They have the best of cannon, these farmers—guns fitted with telescopic sights, and the men to man them, too. Soon they find the range, and then shell after shell drops among our guns. The Boer gunnery is nearly perfect. The guns are well and truly laid; the fuses are timed to the fraction of a second. But for one thing our batteries could not live. Fortunately that one thing is vital. As at Dundee, the Boer shells do not burst, thanks to some rascally contractor, who has stuffed them chiefly with salt.

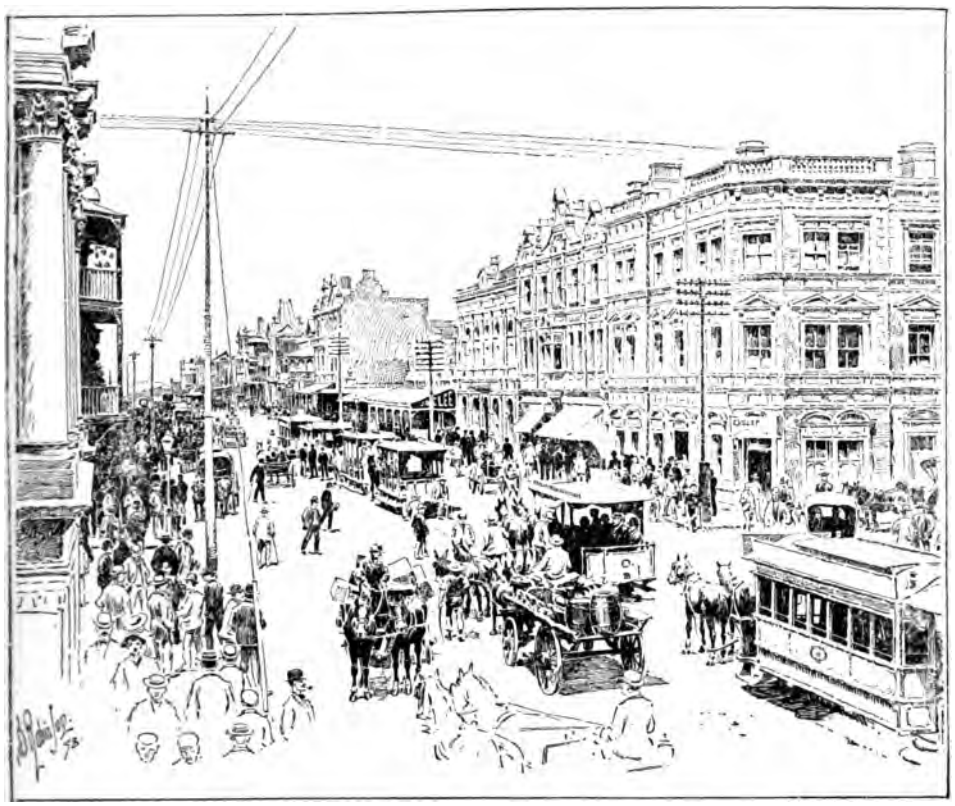
Our shells do burst, however; and they are every bit as well aimed as the enemy's. This is obvious from the fact that before eight o'clock the Boer artillery had almost ceased firing. Occasionally a gun spoke, as some of the artillerymen, driven from their batteries, plucked up courage, returned, and fired an intermittent shot, sending now a shrapnel shell, usually ineffective, and now a common shell, far more likely to be dangerous. A few men and horses were hit by the fragments; but on an average four shells out of five were quite innocuous. Without doubt the British artillery were having the best of the encounter; and Hamilton's men, swarming up, began to make sure that in a couple of hours' time they would carry the position, and raise the siege of Ladysmith ere it had well begun.

It was now about a quarter to eight in the morning. Early enough; but the men had been on the move for four hours. Their chief sustenance was in their pipes; and more than one man was heard to wish aloud that the order would come to go in and finish the job, so that they could get back to camp for dinner. It is no joke to crawl and creep and crouch and lie for four hours under a sun as hot as an English noonday in July. Not to speak of an occasional dust storm, that fills nose and ears and eyes, and, what is

much more serious, the muzzle of your rifle. For a rifle choked with sand is more likely to kill the man firing than the man fired at. So it was, "I wonder how long before we get at them with the steel!"

You see, the British infantryman has an overwhelming desire to "get into" the enemy. It is his training. He looks on the shooting at long range as a mere preliminary to the real business—the tussle with the steel. The Boer is another make of man. His notion is to keep the foe at long range—fight him at 2,000 yards. Tommy Atkins prefers two yards. It is a difference of training and temperament. For a hundred and fifty years the British infantry have conquered by the bayonet. For a longer period than that the South African Dutchman has fought the native enemy at extreme range.

What is that? Do we hear aright?



COMMISSIONER STREET, JOHANNESBURG.
(Photo: H. W. Nicholls, Johannesburg.)

Yes, it is so; this attack is abandoned. The Rifle Brigade, the Manchesters, the Gordons are to move to support the brigade on the right, leaving only the Devons behind to hold the enemy in the centre, and that merely to hold the ridge behind which the centre brigade has been massed.

How is this? Let us see.

A NAVAL GUN PASSING THROUGH LADYSMITH.

I have told how Colonel Grimwood went out against Meyer on the right, to Farquhar's Farm, to hold the Vryheid commandant in check, so that he should give no assistance to his general in the centre. And I have told how all the cavalry available were sent on the outside right of this force.

When morning dawned, Grimwood pushed ahead rapidly. His men did not doubt their ability to send Meyer to the right-about with ease. What was their surprise to find themselves outnumbered by three or four to one. And to increase the surprise, and not to increase its pleasantness, gun after gun dropped shrapnel and common shell amongst our artillery. The 5th Lancers were the first to suffer. Some of them went out to scout on the left—and very necessary it was to have plenty of scouting that day. For the ground was one succession, seemingly endless, of stone-strewn kopjes. It suited the Boers admirably. They were able to creep behind cover, fire from a concealed position, and hit without any chance of being hit back.

The leading squadron of the Royal Irish Lancers found this out pretty soon. They felt their way along the difficult country some little distance, when suddenly, from close in over the crest of the kopje, a rifle fire came pop, pop! pht, pht! And with it a queer crackling noise, an automatic gun, with bursting projectiles, plugged charge after charge into the light horsemen. How the Boers hated these men! Were they not those who had speared them, gored them through and through at Elandslaagte? And it was freely said in Natal in those days that the Dutchmen had sworn to spare not a man of them when Ladysmith fell.

The Lancers fell back and reported what they had seen and experienced; and it soon became certain that the enemy was well posted, as well as being more numerous and better armed than our general had expected. This was unpleasant enough. Worse was to follow. Soon after 7 a.m. batteries opened fire upon Grimwood's artillery—not from the front, but from the left flank and the rear. Colonel Coxhead commanded our batteries here, and he slewed half a dozen guns round swiftly to meet the hidden foe.

And now, on the left of Grimwood's column, the battle raged furiously. Here the enemy massed men and guns, and poured into our batteries and the left of our infantry a terrific fire. A terrible danger threatened—the danger that the left would be totally destroyed, or so broken up that the Boers would be able to drive right through, and then either turn on Hamilton or wind round Grimwood's force.

This move must be prevented at all costs; for if it succeeds the battle is lost, and nothing but a miracle can save Ladysmith. "Quick! The Leicesters forward to the left! Hold them! Stick like leeches! And here, galloper! off with you to Hamilton. Bid him send every man and every gun!"

And here, too, the Royal Artillery shall show a taste of its quality. This is not the moment for the strict rules of the game. We must risk something. So the 53rd Battery flies to the left front. There is no ridge behind which to shelter itself; no hill from behind whose crest to fire. Never mind. Unlimber! "Good mark," you say? Yes, no doubt. The battery is on an open plain, and the Boers can take easy aim at man, horse, and gun. But this is the only way to save the situation Once they pierce our line we are undone.

The gunners work like fiends — but coolly; and if rapidly, without haste. Your man of the Royal Artillery is commonly a person of superior intelligence. He has to be, or he could not work the complicated weapon with which modern science has armed him. And he is usually a man of great dash and nerve, not to say dare-devilry. If he were not, he could never gallop over rocks and embankments, up hill and down dale, never slackening speed, his great gun bump! jump! jump! bump! behind him.

Shrapnel hums round the daring gunners. They fiercely retaliate; and soon it is apparent that the Boer artillerymen, who look suspiciously like Frenchmen and Germans, are outmatched. As for the farmers who carry rifles, they dare not face that awful hail; and they remain in their kopje fastnesses, hidden by the boulders. It was now eight o'clock, or, rather, a little past that hour, and the tension on our right was great. Our men were beginning to learn something of the foe; of his extraordinary nimbleness, that enabled him to throw a large body where he might want it in half the time it took our troops to move. This was his strength. They were learning that, tenaciously as he would hold a position, with all the dogged obstinacy for which the Dutchman has been famed from time immemorial, he was not capable of pressing home an attack. This was his weakness.

Had it not been for this weakness, the whole course of the war might well have been changed from this day. The Boer general, with unerring eye, had seen one weak place, had concentrated his troops there, had gained a decided advantage. And then—he let the opportunity slip through his fingers. The British general paid dearly enough for his under-estimation of the Boer strength and resources; but he might have been made to pay a heavier toll by a foe more enterprising in attack. It was no lack of courage. Heaven forbid that one should charge a brave foe with cowardice! It was simply that the Boer notion of warfare forbade a dash and a hand-to-hand struggle.

Wherefore, one battery and two battalions stopped the gap, and held the foe at bay. For some time this continues. It is only minutes, but it seems hours to the 53rd Battery, as its gunners toil and sweat. Boom! Never was sound more welcome. Pickworth, with the battery from Hamilton's force, has galloped up, and the snappish sound of its cordite greets the anxious ears of the firing line, and shrapnel by the hundredweight hurtles into the kopjes.

And here come some boys of a different colour. The Gordons, cocks of the North, march by, their kilts swishing, their eyes gleaming. And into the firing line they go. And now we are at least two to five; and our gunners are making their target "sit up," as Tommy says. Kilt and khaki lie down on the veldt, and rifle answers rifle. The infantry is now stiffened up a little, and the line is not so thin that it need fear a rush. And now the Manchesters hurry up—just in time, for reinforcements are joining the Boers also, and they line the ridge opposite, and make the air hum with bullets.

Their numbers are so great that they would overlap our extreme right, did not the Imperials and the cavalry dismount, and also join the firing line, using their carbines much better than you would expect from cavalrymen.

Now we, in turn, can attack. Forward! Manchesters and Gordons! But warily. There is plenty of cover here—no need to

make yourselves targets for these sharp-shooters. "Forward, by half-companies." And forward! it is. It is slow work. Five yards in five minutes could not by any stretch of fancy be called a dashing pace. But it is sure. You must keep your dash for the last couple of hundred yards. Now! Ah! we gained 100 yards that time by a quick, masterly rush in the bent-double attitude.

A pious Gordon—we omit his name, for 'tis not for us to perpetuate an indiscretion—suddenly began to curse, calling down maledictions on the Boers and their adverbial country. "What's gone wrong?" "Wrang! I've broke ma big toe on yin o' they rocks." And he has. But he does not fall to the rear disabled, as he has a right to do. He keeps up with the line, vowing to break every bone in the body of the first Boer he can catch.

Steadily the Lancashire lads and the Scotsmen press on; and in half an hour from their appearance the Boers are feeling their presence. For our boys are taking cover better than they did when they stormed the Elandslaagte hill, and are using their rifles splendidly. And as they steal forward, yard by yard, firing, advancing—advancing, firing—the field guns throw shrapnel over their heads at the ridge opposite.

SIR GEORGE WHITE'S HEADQUARTERS AT LADYSMITH, SHOWING SHELL-PROOF SHELTER.

It was distinctly noticeable, in this fight, how much the shooting of the British infantry had improved. To say that it was better than it had been in 1881 was to say little; it had improved out of all knowledge since that time. This improvement was due to a very large extent to Lord Roberts, who, when commander-in-chief in India, had encouraged accuracy and steadiness in shooting by every means in his power. Lord Roberts was a man who had seen a great deal of fighting; and he saw that in future the British infantryman must be a marksman.

Formerly the rifleman had been looked upon as distinct from the infantryman proper. The one was trained to shoot, shoot, and yet again to shoot, only using his bayonet on occasion. The other was trained to use the bayonet; and to use his rifle for volley firing at distances comparatively short. But that had been changed; and when our infantry had become accustomed to the light (and so the judging of distances) in South Africa, their marksmanship was found little, if any, inferior to that of the Boers. Where the burghers had the advantage was chiefly in their ability to find cover.

At about 9 a.m. the artillery fire of the Boers began to slacken, for the Royal Artillery was making their entrenchments more lively than comfortable; and, encouraged by the lull, the Manchesters and Gordons pressed on—now almost to within charging distance of the foe.

A VOLUNTEER CAMP IN NATAL
(Photo: J. H. Murray, Pietermaritzburg.)

A BRUSH WITH THE ENEMY.

CHAPTER XII.

PEPWORTH.

THEN a lamentable blunder occurred—not on the part of General White, or of the attacking force, but on the part of the officer left in command in Ladysmith. A galloper arrived from him with a message to General White: "The enemy are shelling our north camp, and are moving men, evidently to rush the town." This was serious; and General White had no option but to fall back at once and save the camp and town, for those left to guard the town were a mere handful. Colonel Grimwood was immediately ordered to withdraw his infantry.

Up to this time the British had suffered little. They had played the Boer's own game, and played it well; advancing from cover to cover and firing when well sheltered; and they had advanced pretty close in. This only made it worse for them to get back. And it must be said that the retirement was not so well managed as it might have been; for the line of retreat chosen was one leading over a plain for a considerable distance. The enemy were not slow to seize their opportunity. As soon as our men reached the open ground there was poured into their ranks a devastating fire, and the heaviest sufferers were the two battalions of the King's Royal Rifles.

Cursing their luck, with oaths both loud and deep, the riflemen fell back; and here a man dropped and there a man stumbled. This one has a bullet through the heart—no hope for him, poor wretch! That one is shot straight through the shoulder, and

red blood pours down his tunic; still he holds on his way. It is bad, this—bad leading, we should say. For when you are retiring, the proper thing is for one battalion to retire, while another to the right or left of them remains to keep up the shooting, and so reduce the enemy's fire on the retiring force. Then the retiring battalion ought to halt, take such cover as it can find, and blaze away while the other retires. That is, about half should be retiring at once while the other half fights. But here this course was not adopted, and the King's catch it as hot as they are ever likely to catch it, for they retreat in full view of the enemy, and without support.

In point of fact, a battalion was moving up that very moment to give assistance, and was met by the retiring battalions, who blundered straight into them, rendering them quite useless. They could not fire, for fear of hitting our own men.

This was confusion worse confounded; and if the enemy could only rush forward manfully to the ridge recently held by our riflemen, there would be some bad news to-night in England. Sir Archibald Hunter, chief of Sir George White's staff, sees this well enough, so he throws himself once more on the strong arm of the artillery. The 53rd Battery gallops up, the guns going between the files of the infantry at full speed, unlimbers, and starts pumping shrapnel at the foe. The fearless gunners are in the open, and nasty work it is. Shell drops amongst the batteries, and an automatic gun begins to play upon them, firing a little shell that bursts when it touches the ground. The gunners are "in for it" this time. Down drop horse and man.

Crash! What's that? One of their shells has dropped on a gun-limber; and the limber is broken, confound it! Another horse down! That's five they have killed belonging to this one gun. Never mind, men! let them have it! No doubt they are quite as badly hit as we are!

It is queer what tricks the shells play. One bursts within five yards of a private of Engineers. A fragment hits his bayonet, and bends it to a right angle; a splinter smashes his waterbottle; but he himself is absolutely untouched.

Half an hour of this. What is going to happen? Are we to stay here and be shot down and lose our guns? No! The word is given to retire. The infantry has now sorted itself out, and is pretty well out of range. Is this gun to be left behind—the gun with the smashed limber and the slain horses? Ah! Here comes a fresh limber and a new team. It is a ticklish job to fix the gun to it—ticklish enough to drive into the fire and limber up. But there are six heroes willing to try it, and their names shall be recorded—Saunders, bombardier, one of those non-commissioned officers who form the backbone of the British army; Macpherson, Darcy, and Stoddard, drivers; Bright and Barron, limber-gunners. These are the men. Like a whirlwind they dash back to the gun. Rifles crack, shrapnel whistles, percussion shells drop like rain around them. A horse is hit. On! on! No one can live through that fire—that fire from two sides as well as front. On! A gun is a trophy, a glorious thing to gain. Equally, it is disgraceful to lose one. Never shall these clodhoppers be able to brag that they captured a gun of the 53rd Field Battery. The lead ploughs up the dry ground round the horses' hoofs, and clouds of dust arise. On! On!

At last! Here is the gun. Now, "Limber up!" Limber up it is, and with a defiant cheer the six heroes gallop

back to their admiring comrades, who are now taking up a second position in the line of retreat, intent on their purpose to keep the foe at bay and cover the footmen and cavalry retiring. They have to face, not merely a fire from the front, but a hot fire from their left; so they must split their force and swing a section round to meet the cross fire. Here the 13th Battery joins in, and now matters are somewhat easier. They retire now alternately, the 13th covering the retirement of the infantry and of the 53rd Battery, and then trotting or walking back to where the 53rd have by this time reopened fire. Then both batteries unlimber and swing round viciously, and spit death. Then sullenly the 13th trots back on the line of retreat for a few yards, while the 53rd remains spitting.

Once a gun is almost lost. It is a gun of the 53rd Battery, which is in charge of Lieutenant Higgins. In the daredevil fashion peculiar to cross-country riders and Royal Artillerymen, the detachment is taking the weapon across a gully, well within easy rifle-shot of the enemy—not more than 500 yards. Over goes gun and limber, and the men sitting on the limber use expressions not usually heard in polite society. It would be excusable, quite, if they abandoned the gun and looked to their own safety; but that is not the way of the 'tillery. The detachment throws itself at the gun. Mauser bullets, bits of shell, and every other kind of missile ping on the overturned mass. Every horse except one is touched somewhere. A splinter of steel makes an ugly gash on a driver's face. The gunners take no more notice of the shower than of so many drops of rain; and in less than ten minutes they have gun and limber upright again, they limber up, and gallop to rejoin the rest of the battery.

After this, no more accidents. The infantry is now well in hand, retiring slowly and beautifully. For if there is one thing more than another calculated to turn a retirement into a heavy loss, it is hurry. You must retire slowly and in order, else the men get mixed up and confused; and they are, as a rule, more nervous in a retirement under fire than in any other circumstances. A battalion will walk across open ground to the attack, and let itself be decimated without wavering. It will climb steep heights and rush impossible positions under terrible fire without flinching. But the truest test of courage and discipline is this:—Can the battalion retire under fire in order and steadily?

After the first hastiness on the part of the riflemen, there is no confusion, no disorder. The infantry retire by companies, always carefully selecting ground protected from rifle and shell fire. The artillery, as I have said, moves at the trot or walk, with short intervals, when "Unlimber!" is the word, and the guns swing round and snarl angrily. So admirably, in fact, is the whole operation conducted, so dauntless the courage of the gunners, so great their skill, that the Boers only follow at a respectful distance.

Had a French or German force caught an enemy in the predicament of ours that day, something more would probably have happened. Horse artillery would have dashed into the fray, and an effort would have been made to turn the retirement into a rout by throwing every available horse and man on rear and flank of the retreating columns. But for a second time that day the Transvaalers missed their chance. I am not saying that an attempt to press the matter home would have been successful, because the British infantry has, ere now, turned again and rent savagely a

pursuing force. As witness Corunna. But to try the move was, as cricketers say, "the game."

Slowly, not without dignity, the force returned to Ladysmith, retreating but not disgraced. For they had been recalled at the moment when about to attack, and that with a very good chance of success. It was now nearly high noon.

A big position gun on Pepworth Hill was ladling shells into Ladysmith, from a distance of four miles or so. Grimwood's artillery had been able to reach them from out in the open, but once our force retired into Ladysmith we could have no means of replying to the cannonade of Long Tom —for thus Mr. Atkins had nicknamed the big fellow.

Suddenly there was heard from Ladysmith a new kind of report. Mr. Atkins pricked up his ears. What's this? Clearly it is something pretty effective, for after the second explosion Long Tom ceases from troubling.

Decently and in order, though tired and sick at heart—for a retirement is always sickening—the troops filed into camp. And, to their joy and relief, they saw some brown, bearded, muscular fellows pushing projectiles into new, queer-looking weapons; handling them in in a style to make even a Royal Artilleryman go green with envy. And at the side of each gun is a brawny fellow who peers over something, and gives a little jerk here, and pushes with his shoulder occasionally, and, as he pushes, the great weapon moves as easily as one moves a rifle. Two or three times a minute — they can do it much quicker if they like—a shell sails up to Pepworth Hill, and anybody with a telescope can see clouds of dust arise there.

Tommy cheers. "What ho! Jack!" Yes! It is Jack, unassuming Jack, the man whom you "meet all over the world, a-doin' all kinds er things." This time, he has landed himself at Durban, he has made a couple of gun-carriages, new and original ones, and trotted off to Ladysmith with two guns. Hurrah! for the Four-point-sevens. They have saved the situation.

Last week White sent urgently to Durban. He had no big guns. Could the ships of war lend him some? Easier said than done; for, although the ships had guns, they had no carriages to transport them on. What is to be done?

Gentle reader, did you ever know the Royal Navy really at its wits' end? My own impression is that when this country really wants any business executed with promptness and despatch, she never gets it done unless she sends an admiral to do it. There did not happen to be an admiral at Durban, but there were a couple of captains. Lambton was the one — his ancestor was the Earl of Durham who gave a constitution to Canada. Scott, another Northumbrian, was the other.

And they put their heads together, and made up their minds that a gun or two of long range must go up to Ladysmith. And Captain Percy Scott had an idea. And he called to him artificers and workmen—naval artificers, mind you; men who never say "Can't be done"—and amongst them they evolved a model of a gun-carriage. And the naval artificers worked and sweated and made two of them, and they planted two guns of 4.7 inch calibre on them, and Lambton himself, with Lieutenant Egerton, collected 280 men—bluejackets. And the lot of them bolted to Ladysmith, taking with them not only the 4.7's, but also a couple of field guns and four $12\frac{1}{2}$-pounder guns of the Elswick variety.

At eleven o'clock that Monday morning

they arrived—the last reinforcement to get through. And it did not take them long to grasp the situation. "Hurry up, lads! We'll astonish these fellows!" They hurried up. The Ladysmith people had seen some smart work within the week, but never had they seen the like of this. In an hour the guns were laid, and almost exactly at noon the Boers received their surprise. It took the form of a lyddite shell, and it burst on Pepworth Hill. Telescope to eye, Egerton watched its flight. "That's not quite the thing. A leetle . . . so!" And a second mass sailed through the air.

Captain Lambton's glass was at his eye. Soon he brought it down. "Hit it fairly that time." And so it had. The second missile had struck Long Tom, had knocked him over, and, bursting, had scattered death, confusion, and dismay amongst the Boer gunners.

For some time the Jack Tars kept going, flinging shells into gun positions and infantry entrenchments, and ere long the Boers gave up all hope of a successful attack that day.

At first the lyddite shell created an impression almost amounting to terror amongst the Boers. They regarded it as uncanny, and with feelings amounting to dismay. And their objection to it was that it killed without wounding. General Joubert even went so far as to write to General White protesting against the use of these shells as being contrary to the usages of civilised warfare!

The exact composition of lyddite—which takes its name from a little place in Kent, called Lydd, where it is made—is known only to the select few. But its effect is this. It is timed to burst when it drops among the enemy; and when it bursts, the lyddite sets up a fearful explosion of much the same character as that produced by a lighted match in a room where there has been an escape of gas. The radius of effect is about fifty yards; and within this radius the air is driven outwards with such force as to cause violent concussion of the brain to anyone within reach of it. It will fracture the drum of the ear; but it always leaves the body of its victim without a mark. According to General Joubert, this was making war with chemicals—a proceeding usually ranked amongst those tactics which use explosive bullets and poisoned steel. The question is, Where are you to draw the line? This much is certain: that death by lyddite is not unnecessarily painful, as death by (say) an explosive bullet would be. It is, in fact, about the most painless death known on the battlefield.

If General Joubert complained of the naval men's shells, so also the naval men had their little grievance against some of Joubert's men. It appears that when Long Tom was thrown off his balance, Captain Lambton saw, or thought he saw, a Boer jump on the gun and wave a white flag. Under this impression, the gallant commander ceased firing at that gun. What was his indignant horror, when, a few hours later, the same piece recommenced firing. The enemy had used the grace accorded to them to set up their gun again, and fortify it! Lambton wrote a hot and indignant note, claiming the gun as his prize by the laws of war. But he didn't get it, laws or no laws.

But the greatest grievance of all was the one against Colonel Knox, who had sent the urgent message recalling the troops from their assault on Lucas Meyer and the Boer left wing.

"Attack in force from the north."

The wily Joubert had simply out-

THE LEICESTERS UNDER SHELL FIRE.

generalled him. There was no attack from the north. There never would have been any attack from the north. The troops seen on the move in that direction were few in number, and were only making a feint, hoping to induce the British general to believe in an attack from the north. "Slim" Piet Joubert knew that if he could humbug the thick-headed Englander into this belief, he would come back and leave Lucas Meyer alone.

And Slim Piet succeeded.

This is called, in some circles, "bluff." In others they call it "strategy." But its effect is the same.

So ended the engagement of Farquhar's Farm—a drawn battle. But White had succeeded to some extent—he had given the enemy a handful, and had prevented him from cutting off the railroad to the south whilst the naval guns came up. And it was to the naval guns that Ladysmith owed its salvation.

LADYSMITH.

CHAPTER XIII.

NICHOLSON'S NEK.

WHAT befell the main body of the troops at Ladysmith has been told: how they out-fought the enemy, only to be by him out-manœuvred and tricked of a victory —of how the Boers got them in a tight place, out of which they were rescued only by the 4.7 guns of the ubiquitous sailormen.

Now will be related the things that happened to the little column under Carleton, which we last heard of as it set out to the north-west at 10.30 on that eventful Sunday night.

A word or two about the composition of the little force:—Colonel Carleton had at his disposal six companies of the 1st Royal Irish Fusiliers and four and a half companies of the 1st Gloucestershire Regiment, together with the 10th Mountain Battery of the Royal Artillery. In all, he had about 1,100 men and six guns. The Fusiliers had already proved their worth in this campaign. They were early in the Boer entrenchments at Talana, and had borne with great courage and spirit the rigours of the forced marches from Dundee to Ladysmith. The Gloucesters had not seen so much service as the Irish, but they were good men, and anxious to strike a blow to avenge the death of their colonel, fallen at Rietfontein.

The mountain battery had been sent upon this particular errand as being the kind of artillery best suited for operations among the hills. Mountain guns, which are screw guns (seven-pounders), are carried by mules. They were first used by us in the hilly districts of Northern India. The guns are carried on the backs of mules, supported on iron saddles or cradles. The carriages also are carried in sections in the same way, and the ammunition is in boxes, which are slung between the mules. When a gun is brought into action, it and its carriage have to be unslung from the mules' backs and fitted together.

Colonel Carleton's column was accompanied then by a large number of animals, for, in addition to the 200 or so of mules required for the battery, the reserve ammunition for infantry was also carried in the same way. Now these mules are driven not by soldiers but by native muleteers, and a number of artificers accompany the battery. The battery mules were trained and seasoned animals. But the other beasts were new to the work, and raw. Moreover, they were not accustomed to their muleteers. The mule is an animal of great strength and endurance, and wonderfully sure-footed, but, like all four-footed creatures, it is nervous and liable to be seized with panic at any sudden, unaccustomed alarm. A thoroughly seasoned army-transport mule has been trained to the intent that it shall not be nervous. It has had blank cartridge fired close to its ears, and has in other ways been taught not to be frightened by the sights and sounds inseparable from warfare.

Now a word as to the formation of the country and the work that Carleton's column had been sent to perform. Between General Joubert's main position on the north of Ladysmith, and the army of

Free Staters on the west, there was a long hill, shaped like a horse's back, steep in ascent, and terminating in a ridge about a quarter of a mile in length, this ridge being a little higher at the north end than at the south. The task of Carleton's column was this: to climb in the night the steep southern approach to this ridge, to reach the ridge itself before daylight, and, when morning dawned and Hamilton made his attack on Joubert's main position, to hold the ridge and so stave off the Free Staters.

As the ridge ran at right angles between Joubert and the Free State force, it will be seen that the column would do more than merely keep the Free Staters engaged. They would, in fact, cut them quite off from Joubert; and, if they could hold the position successfully, they might, with some guns and part of their infantry, make a very serious flank attack on General Joubert's right. There can, however, be little doubt that the Boers had received timely information of the movement. All through the war, in fact, British generals had to fight under the disadvantage of having traitors in the camp. As a result, a force going out by night to effect a surprise was itself surprised.

The little party set out in the darkness —the Royal Irish Fusiliers leading, the mules following with guns and ammunition, the Gloucesters bringing up the rear. So inky black was the night that progress could only be slow; and it was past midnight ere the column reached the foot of the ascent. Now began an awkward climb. The mules picked their way over and between the loose stones that strewed the steep hillside, and the infantry panted up, toilsomely clambering. Here and there a man stumbled as he put his foot into a hole or kicked against a stone. It was literally impossible to see a yard ahead. They scrambled up in the blackness, halting now and again to take breath. It was hard work, for, in addition to their arms, the men carried greatcoats, haversacks, and all the complicated array of heavy leather straps which a beneficent Government has provided for better reducing the speed of the long-suffering infantryman.

In low murmurs the officers encouraged the men. "Be gosh, sorr. But this is loike cloimbing up the soide av a house." Still, they went on, for they were told that half the ascent had been accomplished, when, almost at the same moment, three or four rifle reports broke the silence; and there came bumping and bounding down the precipitous slope great boulders.

In a moment all was confusion. The shots scared the raw mules, some of whom were hit. The great stones frightened them still more. Nothing could stop them. And, like the Gaddarene swine, they ran violently down the steep place. Crash! Splash! The old battery mules became infected with the fear, and ten seconds after the first alarm nearly every single mule was charging at full speed through the infantry who had been toiling up behind. The Gloucesters, thinking it an attack, fired at the charging line, but the mules broke through and tore away.

This was serious. No guns. No ammunition except that which each man carried. The officers were beside themselves, for doubtless this portended an attack. Whence? It need hardly be said that not an enemy was to be seen; so dark was the night. Should they go back to Ladysmith? But Colonel Carleton decided that he would not. The Free Staters (so the scouts had reported) were few in number; and once more the quality of the dauntless British infantry was relied upon to counterbalance any slight superiority in armament

—or in anything else. Besides, to return would be to spoil the whole plan of attack so carefully worked out by the general.

Slowly and steadily the column pushed on. On and up, on and up! Until at last the crest of the ridge was reached. Here companies and sections found themselves again, and formed up in order once more. Much to their amazement, they were not met by any fire. After those first few shots and boulders the Boers left the little force alone. Let us see what they did.

They acted in much the same manner as a sportsman would act if he were stalking big game in a forest. Such an one, if out at night, would probably track the animal to his lair, leave an attendant, or shikarri, to keep watch to see that the prey did not escape in the night, and then lie down and wait until morning. And that is precisely what the Boers did. They stalked the column until it reached the crest of the hill. Then they posted men to keep observation, while the rest spread themselves out on the bare ground and slept, to be ready for the *battue* in the morning.

Meanwhile the Gloucesters and the Irish Fusiliers worked hard. No sleep for them. They had been sent to hold the ridge, and their only chance of holding it was to make it safe against rifle and shell fire. For now they had no artillery. So they hunted for stones and built sangars for protection. The toil was great: the result small. For the number of suitable stones was few, and the work in the dark unsatisfactory. And so when morning broke it found our infantry worn with loss of sleep, with labour, and with marching, while the Boers rose fresh and fit from their hard couch.

what did the sun reveal to the weary British column? It revealed a state of things calculated to fill the bravest with dismay, for it showed that, instead of being on a ridge whence they could command the country round, they were only on the lower end of the saddle-shaped hill; the north end, where the enemy was snugly entrenched, was slightly higher than the south end, where our men had halted. The column was, in fact, far short of the point aimed at. Moreover, the sangars built were of the slenderest, and there was little protection to be had from them. The hill had to be held from all sides, being open to attack from its northern end and from the east, south, and west approaches. Worst of all, some 1,500 yards away, on the south and west, were other hills, higher than this; and in these the Boers had large parties of riflemen, who could fire down on our men.

Dispositions were quickly made. The Gloucesters took the northern side, heaping up stones as well as they could and mounting their Maxim guns. They had an almost flat piece to defend—that is, from an attack coming from the other end of the "back." The Royal Irish Fusiliers defended the west and south slopes.

Now these slopes were exceedingly steep and very difficult to defend. They were not so precipitous that they could not be climbed by armed men—our own infantry had climbed the southern approach. Had that been the case, no defence would have been needed. And, on the other hand, they were too steep to be defended by rifle fire. You observe that to defend a steep hill by fire, the steeper the hill the nearer to the edge of the crest do you have to go in order to fire over it at men on the hillside.

Immediately daylight showed, the enemy

on the hills overlooking the position began a fire—not in sustained volleys, but individual firing—a sort of go-as-you-please. Occasionally our men replied, but not to any great extent. They were busy building breastworks of stones to be ready for the more serious assault that must certainly come. About eight o'clock (a.m.) more Boers began to ride up, single Boers, small parties of Boers, in the most irregular and unmilitary manner, more like sportsmen riding to a meet than soldiers coming to a field of battle. For all that, when they did arrive, they made a very respectable body, and by half-past eight their fire was pretty heavy.

THE 10TH MOUNTAIN BATTERY.

Let this be said. If our centre attack had been pushed home and Hamilton's brigade had stormed Joubert's position—even if they had "gone for" for it, instead of being recalled to assist the British right early in the day, this chapter might never have been written. In all human probability it would not have been.

And now, leaving "might-have-been," let us see what was.

As soon as Colonel Hamilton's artillery and the main body of his infantry had been sent to resist Meyer, the hands of General Joubert were freed; and he could devote some attention to the little force on his right. As we said before,

General White's plan was first changed at about nine o'clock, and from that time strong parties of Boers hurried along from Pepworth ridge to Nicholson's Nek. Transvaalers these—foes far more formidable than the Free State levies. They were commanded by Ben Viljoen, a skilful leader.

A hot fire from 500 rifles swept the defenders from west and south. A still more terrible fire, at one-third of the range, was poured in from the other (north) end of the plateau. Many of the Boers used Martini rifles, and the heavy bullets from these knocked the slight stone breastworks to pieces. Still our men fired on. They were quite without cover, for it is impossible to get cover that will shelter you on three sides at once. And the fire of the enemy was a cross-fire—always the most harassing as well as the most deadly.

A small party of the Gloucesters, holding an advanced position to the north, was compelled to fall back on the main body. It was terrible, that retreat. Men dropped in groups, with holes in chest and head, with limbs torn and bones smashed by the heavy Martini bullets. More horrible still, their ammunition was running short.

The Gloucesters were losing heavily. The Boers advanced from their end of the plateau, some crawling in advance, while others, some distance behind, took cover and fired over the heads of their comrades advancing to the attack. Now 600 Boer rifles blaze at the West-countrymen in front, at a distance of from 400 to 200 yards. To rush out with the bayonet was impossible in the teeth of the threefold hail of bullets.

The Irish suffered still more terribly. They dropped like flies. And yet so weary were they that even in the midst of that life and death struggle many of them fell asleep! These were men who had been put on picket duty for two nights after their march from Dundee. For the last eight nights they had had only one for sleep; and that in the pouring rain on the banks of the Waschbank Spruit. This last night-march had finished them, and so they slept. And some of them never woke more. For Mauser and Martini did deadly work amongst them.

The last cartridge has been fired. Still the deadly hail continues. Father Matthew, best of *padres*, goes round amongst the dead and dying, binding up wounds, administering last words of hope and consolation. The Boers are creeping up. There are no more cartridges. May those mules broil in the hottest pit in Tophet! What shall we do?

"Faugh-a-Ballaghs! Fix bayonets! and die like men!"

The sleepy, weary, lion-hearted boys jump to their feet. From their parched throats bursts the wild cheer that prefaces some deed of daring by the lads who clear the way. Die like men! Ay, that will we. We will die to a man; but the Boers shall not all live to boast of it. Fix bayonets! A flash; and the ready steel leaps from the scabbard. "Faugh-a-Ballagh!" They are not tired now. For they are no longer to sit still and lie down and be shot like rabbits. Their steel shall bite deep in this last ——.

What's that? The "Cease fire"? A look of incredulous amazement breaks over their faces. "Surrender?" "White flag?" With an execration so fierce that it almost frightened their officers, the Irishmen swore that, white flag or no white flag, they would never surrender. But it was true enough. A junior officer of the Gloucesters had ordered the white flag to be displayed on perceiving the Boers about to open with artillery. And, though the

emblem of surrender had been displayed without the order of the officer commanding, there was no honourable course open but to keep faith and yield themselves.

The scene amongst the Fusiliers was heartbreaking. At first, some scores would not lay down their arms. "Let me kill one of 'em, and Oi'll doi happy." The officers and the good priest went amongst them and besought them, and even used force, to make them put their rifles on the ground.

"Father, I'd rather have been shot than this!"

"Oh! what'll the rij'mint think av us?"

And they wept, and dashed down their arms, and took their belts off and threw them about, and cursed like very fiends of hell, because they had been prevented from dying like men. The black shame of it. We, the Faugh-a-Ballaghs. *We!* WE!! to surrender—and to surrender to these fellows. What will the regiment think of us? What will Ireland say of us? How shall we ever hold up our heads again? How shall we, for shame's sake, be able to carry the motto, "Faugh-a-Ballagh?" *

Lion-hearted! Your country shall speak of you; but not with shame. Your regiment shall think of you, but not with scorn. For ye have not tarnished the glory of your name, nor caused to fade one leaf of your laurels!

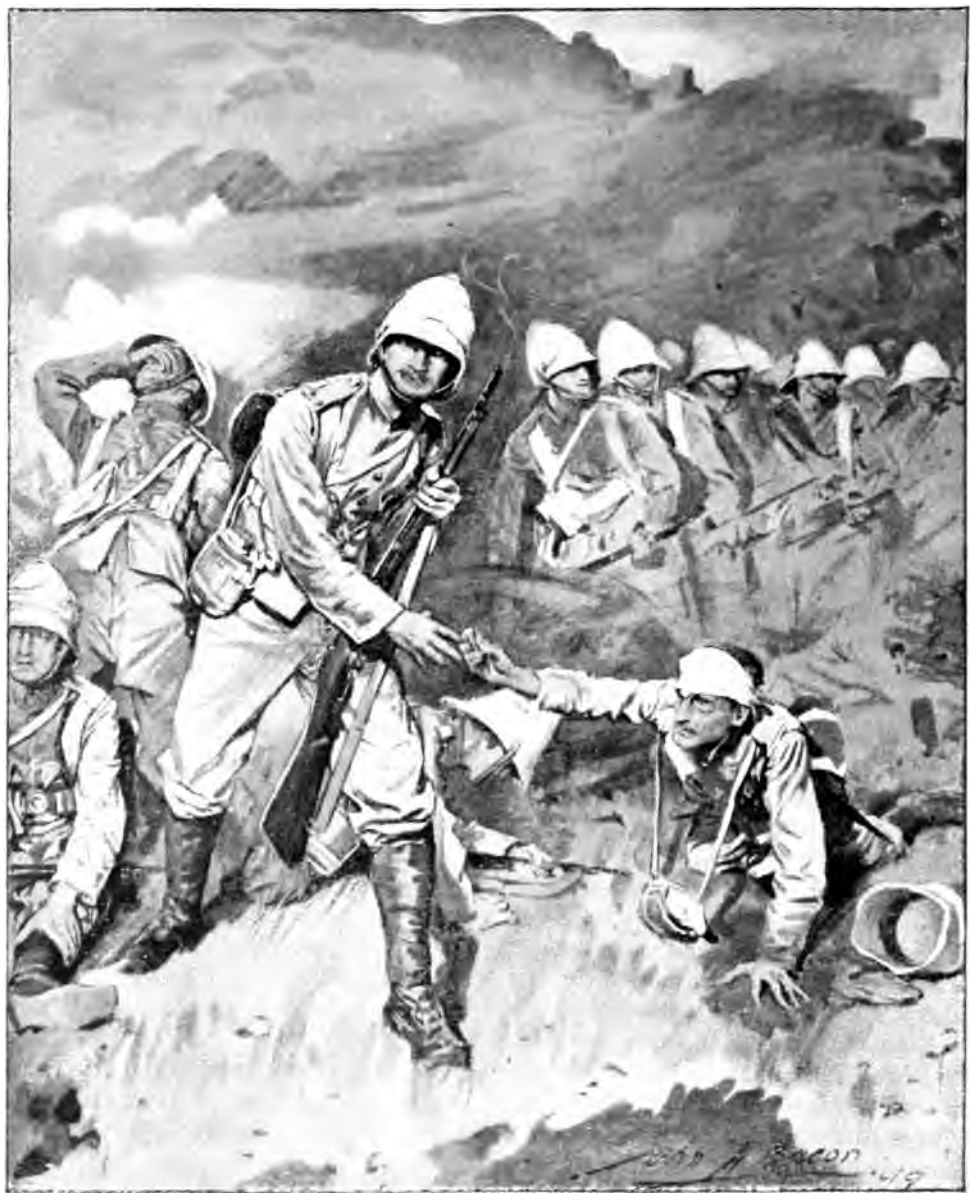
The officer of the Gloucesters who hoisted the white flag gave as his excuse that he thought his company the only one left. In fact he believed, also, that without artillery the position was untenable against artillery. He was undoubtedly to blame. He exaggerated the effect of artillery fire; which, as the whole course of the war proved, is almost ineffective against men lying down. And the moral effect of the surrender was tremendous. It gave the Boers enormous confidence in themselves and contempt for the British. It was the first of a series of surrenders which disgraced the British arms. A fight to the death had been preferable.

The Dutchmen, triumphant now, headed by Commandant Ben Viljoen, the young Transvaaler, crowded to the top of the ridge to receive the surrender, and it must be said of them that they did not, by word or deed, try to add to the humiliation of their prisoners. The prisoners, too, did not bear themselves with humility. They had fought a great fight, and they held their heads high, as British soldiers should. But in their hearts was a burning sensation of rage and shame. Better, far better, they thought, to have died like men with bayonets fixed.

What a ghastly sight that plateau showed. Over two hundred men strewed its surface—some with pale, ghastly faces, fixed and set in death. Others bleeding from wounds in limb, and trunk, and head. One man had seven wounds—five bullets had gone clean through him. But he was not dead. Others were maimed for life; but for the most part the wounds were clean and humane, if that word can appropriately be used.

And so 700 or more officers and men were marched off to Pretoria, there to join the 18th Hussars—victims, like themselves, of the configuration of the country. But not all were captured—a few managed to make good their escape. And of these, none had much more remarkable adventures than Bigmore, a gunner in the 10th Mountain Battery. He was captured by some Irish-Americans who had enlisted in the Transvaal Army; and they marched him towards the Boer laager. But Bigmore had no idea of surrendering tamely. He did not relish the thought of Pretoria gaol.

* *Faugh-a-Ballagh* = clear the way.



THE LAST CARTRIDGE.

So, seizing the first opportunity, he jumped on one of his captors and snatched from him his rifle. There was no time to shoot, so the stalwart gunner gripped the weapon by the barrel and brought the stock down on his victim's head. That was one. The others came at him in a body; but he swung round again and stunned a second foe. "Ho! My! Don't yer come a-nigh, when Tommy is a-playin' with the bayonet and the butt," sings Rudyard Kipling. And the captors had no desire to come too nigh to Gunner Bigmore or to get within sweep of him.

Then the artilleryman made a judicious movement to the rear. In other words, he bolted as fast as he could, running behind boulders, dodging down declivities, and using all the tricks he knew to prevent his pursuers from getting a clear shot at him. By good luck he "wandered" them, as the Scot expressively puts it; and then he also got "wandered." We do not know whether any one who reads this book has ever been in a hilly country, perfectly new and strange to him, where he is unacquainted with the landmarks, without a guide. If so, that reader will know the kind of position that Gunner Bigmore was in. A Boer, or an Australian bushman, or an American, prairie-born-and-bred, having come so far in the dark, would have been able to get back to Ladysmith again. But Bigmore was none of these. He was just a lad from the Welsh border —Newport, Mon.

He had to hide, too; to keep himself as "dark" as possible, or he would soon have been recaptured. He saw, during his wanderings, Boers many—single Boers and Boers in squadrons; but he managed to hide so successfully that none of them saw him. At last, after about twenty-four hours of wandering, he found himself at a farmhouse a dozen miles from the camp. Now the farmer was a loyalist; and he soon informed the gunner that he was not the only guest. There was also about the place a Hussar, a solitary cavalryman who had escaped when Moller's men were trapped after Talana Hill. The pair of wanderers determined to attempt Ladysmith or perish; and so they set out at night, the artilleryman hanging to the stirrup of his new-found comrade. Their task was no easy one; for they had to pass right through the Boer lines. Still, they determined to "try their luck," as they called it; and made up their minds to cut down any Boer sentry who challenged them. Warily, stealthily, they crept through the sentries. Round a laager of waggons, across a bit of open ground—now to get under the shadow of this hill. Good! They haven't caught us yet. There's a beggar doing sentry-go. Wait until he turns, and then rush. Hurrah! We are through them now; and the British camp lies straight before us.

"Do you think, cocky, you could do a sprint?"

"I reckon so," replies Bigmore.

"Then come on!" And the Hussar touches his nag with the spur, the gunner seizes a stirrup, after the manner of the famous mixed charge at Waterloo, and away they go across the open ground.

"Who comes there?" Welcome sound to the ears of the fugitives. "Friends!" "Halt, friends! and give the countersign!" The picket is called up. The officer questions the men, takes them in under guard—for one has to be careful in war time. But their identity is soon established; and ere long they find themselves recounting the stories of their several wanderings to admiring and sympathetic comrades.

Altogether, of the men who set out with Colonel Carleton that fateful Sunday night, less than one hundred returned unwounded —less than one-tenth of the force sent out. Fifty-two were killed; 150 wounded; the rest found themselves, in a few days, prisoners of war in Pretoria.

It was quite obvious to General White and his staff that something had befallen the column under Colonel Carleton. The extent of the disaster was not known; but it was quite evident, when the force did not return on Monday afternoon, that it had, at all events, met the enemy. The general did not, of course, know of the stampede of the mules, nor, consequently, that the party was without artillery; and he thought, and hoped, that Carleton might be able to hold his own during Monday and return to Ladysmith after dark.

But late that afternoon a message arrived from General Joubert, sent by the hand of a Royal Irish Fusilier, stating that two battalions had fallen into his hands, and that White might send assistance to the wounded and burial parties for the slain. The messenger told to the horrified staff the story of the disaster. The distress of Sir George White was obvious and unconcealed. As a man he was affected by the story of the loss of life; as a soldier he was moved by the recital of the heroism of the men; as a general he lamented the loss of more than a battalion of splendid soldiers.

Surgeons and ambulance men at once set out to the scene of the disaster. The camp was plunged into gloom. And the mules and their drivers, and the Boers, and everything and everybody, came in for curses loud and deep.

Meanwhile the general set about the hardest part of his task—to let the people at home know the disaster that had befallen our arms. His message was manly, straightforward, simple, direct. He did not blame the men or the officers of the column, but himself took all responsibility. Many might have said: "I was misled by my scouts. My maps were defective. Why was I not supplied with more trained animals?" Not so Sir George White. This is how his message ran:—

"I have to report a disaster to a column sent by me to take a position on hill to guard the left flank of the troops in these operations to-day.

"The Royal Irish Fusiliers, No. 10 Mountain Battery, and the Gloucester Regiment, were surrounded in hills, and after losing heavily had to capitulate.

"Casualties not yet ascertained.

"A man of Royal Irish Fusiliers employed as hospital orderly came in under flag of truce with a letter from the survivors of the column and asked for assistance to bury the dead.

"I fear there is no doubt of the truth of the report.

"I formed the plan in carrying out which the disaster occurred, and am alone responsible for that plan.

"No blame whatever attaches to the troops, as the position was untenable."

"Alone responsible for that plan."

The effect of the news in Britain was curious. Men walked the streets with set face and fixed look. How many men had been killed? "Surrounded in the hills." Had they walked into a trap and been shot down helpless and unresisting? "Survivors" indicated that there had been many slain. It was a horrible experience. After all, this was not to be a picnic—a march to Pretoria and back.

But the people of Britain, though their pride of arms received a shock, were

neither dismayed nor cast down. The numerous unfriends of this country, represented chiefly by the gutter press of Paris, shrieked with delight, and said, "Now we shall see these English weeping and tearing their hair." One journal went so far as to send a representative over to London to watch the effects of the news. Never was journalist more astonished. Instead of finding the metropolis in gloom, with shutters up, and mobs parading the street howling for the downfall of the Ministry, he found London much as usual. Business was in no way suspended or interfered with. And the people whom the journalist saw and interviewed merely said: "Yes! It's a bad job. But we cannot expect to win every time. This only makes it the more necessary to continue the war."

It is not too much to say that the behaviour of the nation extorted the admiration of foreign peoples. And of none more than of our volatile neighbours across the Channel. These *Anglais* might be world-greedy, they might be a sad and gloomy people. My faith, how could you expect anything better of a people who lived in fog for nine months of the year? But they were, at least, dignified. They could bear reverses calmly. They had faith in themselves and their cause. A general who lost a battalion was not necessarily a fool, a knave, or a traitor. The Government responsible for the conduct of the war was not a pack of imbeciles at the first defeat.

And the French journals and public men cried aloud their admiration of our stoicism. It was not the stoicism of mere insensibility. It was the sustained courage of a nation which had set out on a task, and was resolved, come weal, come woe, not to turn back. Many there were who blamed White, for at that time the country did not know how the disaster had been brought about. It was thought that the men had been sent to hold an untenable position. This was not so. The position they had been sent to hold was not exactly a strong place of defence, but it was one that could have been held by infantry, especially if supported by artillery. As a matter of fact, that position was never reached. The ridge held, or attempted to be held, was two miles short of the position they were sent to occupy.

Neither did the country know, at that time, how the disaster had occurred in the chapter of accidents—the raw, untrained transport mules—the stampede which left our gallant fellows without artillery, or water, or spare ammunition. And so White was blamed on all hands. Yet even with the blame was mingled pity and admiration for the chivalrous soldier who assumed the whole fault to himself. The despatch was on a level with that he sent after the victory at Elandslaagte, when he gave all the credit to General French—"I attended as a spectator."

The day of the disaster, General Sir Redvers Buller landed at the Cape; and the news of his arrival was hailed with delight both in Britain and the Colonies most concerned. Here was the man who would repair all blunders and resume the march, so rudely interrupted, to Pretoria.

In Natal and amongst the British in Cape Colony, the tidings of the disaster caused far more consternation even than in England—as well they might. For it seemed as though, after all, the British troops, in whom the colonials had confidence as in an impregnable bulwark, were no match for the Dutchmen. This was the position:—There had been one real, substantial victory—at Elandslaagte. There had been another brilliant feat of arms at

Dundee, but the battle of Talana Hill was, in actual result, barren. The Boers had been beaten there, but not smashed and pulverised as they ought to have been. And the driving of them from their entrenchments had not in the least saved Dundee and the rest of Northern Natal. On the contrary, the invaders had returned in force and compelled the British to fall back forty miles. The retirement was a magnificent feat, but still it was a retirement. All Northern Natal, with the railways from the Free State and the Transvaal, were in the undisturbed possession of the hostile powers. They were closing on the garrison—practically the total British force available—in Ladysmith. The general had dashed out on them, trying to defeat them in detail, but they had outwitted and outmanœuvred—everything but outfought him. Nothing saved Ladysmith that day but the opportune arrival of a handful of sailors and their magnificent gunnery.

And now, worst blow of all, over a thousand of Britain's most splendid infantry had been entrapped. Some had been shot down, and the others captured.

It was a bitter pill for Englishmen at home. How much more bitter for Britons living in a country where more than half the population made little secret of their joy at the success of the enemy and the misfortunes of our countrymen!

We have seen the calm, deliberate way in which the Dutchmen stalked our men that night. After scaring the baggage mules, they fired not a shot, so that Carleton's men had not the least idea how many of the enemy were thereabouts, or in what direction they were posted. We have seen how they rode up from the centre, ensconced themselves on the kopjes, and fired at the excellent target provided by our men.

There was a remarkable contrast between the two opposing forces. The British, highly drilled; nourished from their military infancy on the goose-step; taught to march like a wall, to wheel in such perfect formation that it was like the revolution of a windmill's sail: their evolutions, for the greater part of the year, taking place in a barrack-square in some town. Taught to fire in volleys with such perfection that the click of the thousand rifle-bolts made only one sound. In all these things, in marching in quarter-column with perfect dressing and distance, in shouldering arms like one man, in all the minutiæ of the old Prussian school, our men were perfect. They acted on the word of command with such wonderful discipline that until the word was given they remained stolid and steady.

They could fight. There was no doubt of that. Let their officers lead them by sections and half companies, and companies and battalions, within striking distance of the foe, and then let the bugle and the pipes sound the "charge"; and nothing—neither Boers nor any other living creatures—could withstand the onslaughts. But they had their limitations—limitations born of the conditions under which they were trained. Six months of drill-sergeant tends to knock out of almost any man all the initiative that nature may have endowed him with. "Theirs not to reason why!" That is discipline. But—and let it not be imagined that we write against discipline—the man who for a year or two only acts on the word of command is in danger of becoming so much a part of a machine that he cannot act without the word.

Now take the Boer. No whit more brave than the British soldier; infinitely less brave in a hand-to-hand encounter; he was far superior in a war where the

formation of the country renders it impossible for men to act in large compact masses. Put a Boer on the field of battle; tell him in general terms what you want him to do, and then leave him alone. In fact, the unit of the Boer army was not the company, the battalion, the troop, or the squadron, it was the individual. They had no need of thirteen commissioned and non-commissioned officers to 101 privates. They hardly needed any officers at all.

In crawling up to storm a position, they had no need to be led to cover. They found cover themselves, creeping from point to point as their intelligence and experience suggested. Put them on a kopje, or in an entrenchment, and tell them to hold it—they wanted no further orders. In fact, every man was pretty much his own lieutenant, his own captain, and his own sergeant and corporal. All he wanted was a general and a colonel. It was an army of units as opposed to a war machine.

Another thing that had made itself apparent more than ever, was the surprising celerity of the Boer movements. On this Monday of which I speak, General Joubert had been able to throw a force over to Lucas Meyer on his left at twice the speed with which White had been able to send his infantry to checkmate the move. Again, when he heard that a British force was cooped up on his right, the Transvaaler had easily sent, in a very short time, some hundreds of rifles to join in the attack on them.

Mounted infantry—that was the force for such a country. And ere long the British Government was to find it out—to find that a man on foot cannot cope with one mounted on a hardy pony. And already there were those who said that Sir Redvers Buller had grievously erred in judgment when he asked for "Infantry! Infantry!" and had (for the policy was his) accepted from the Colonies who offered troops, only foot-soldiers. "Preference will be given to infantry"—and he might have had a few thousand mounted rifles who could ride (ay, and shoot, too) as well as any Boer who ever trod the veldt. The full folly of the "Infantry! Infantry!" policy had not yet been made apparent; but it was beginning to be felt.

But the British public, and the British colonies, were not daunted by this disaster. The Government showed no signs of weakening. A cablegram was instantly despatched to Sir Redvers Buller that 10,000 more troops would at once be despatched to fill vacancies; and the people once more resigned themselves to await the next move.

News came of transports nearing their destination; and the heart of the country followed them, and anxious eyes scanned the news from Cape Town. Could White, with his weakened forces, hold the foe at bay until reinforcements arrived? That was the question of the hour.

Her anxiety notwithstanding, it must be recorded that in her first hours of trial Britain bore herself bravely and steadfastly in the eyes of the world.

HELIOGRAPHING.

CHAPTER XIV.

NORTHERN CAPE COLONY—A SKIRMISH AT BELMONT.

LET us now leave Natal for a moment and see how events progressed in Cape Colony since we were last there.

Martial law was proclaimed in the De Aar and Orange River districts in the first week in November, in order to leave the British commanders free to deal with suspected persons, untrammelled by the ordinary civil law of the country. By the ordinary law every man can go where he pleases, and do what he likes, provided he does not commit a crime, and no man can be locked up on the mere suspicion that he might do this, that, or the other. But in time of war, in the districts where warlike operations are being carried on, it is absolutely necessary for the good conduct of those operations, and for the safety of the army, that the military authorities on the spot should be able to do practically as they please. They must have the power to order people to remove themselves out of the district, or to confine them within certain limits. They must be able to arrest and confine at pleasure anybody who might be likely to assist the enemy. They must have the right to take possession of private property, or destroy it if they should think such measures advisable.

In fact, martial law means the government of the country affected at the will of the officer commanding the troops there. It is a temporary military despotism, only held in check by the fear of public opinion and the necessity, under which every army labours, of making its presence as little burdensome

as possible to the inhabitants of its own territory.

On the 6th of November the British blew up the culvert between Arundel and Tweeddale, on the road to Naauwpoort; and on the 7th the Boers moved in force on Aliwal North, and the British garrison—a tiny party—had to abandon that place. Colesberg, afterwards the scene of prolonged operations, was taken by a commando on the 15th. Colesberg is a small town surrounded by kopjes, which, if fortified and held by a force of 2,000 men with artillery, might have held out indefinitely. But the 2,000 men were not there. Half the population was disloyal, and there was no attempt at resistance. Moving swiftly on the 14th the Boers took possession of the kopjes all round the town, and when the townsfolk woke the next morning they found themselves cut off.

Resistance was quite hopeless, and the Free Staters rode in the next morning and took possession. As this was one of the places comprised in the district that had been annexed by proclamation, the burghers proceeded with great ceremony to hoist the flag of the Orange Free State as a symbol of sovereignty. But—was it an omen?—as soon as the bunting reached the top of the flagstaff down it fell, bag and baggage! Some loyal inhabitants had quietly sawn through the staff in gleeful anticipation of the catastrophe. After this little incident the proceedings were less formal. The flag was hoisted, it is true, but on a bamboo pole. Thus the invaders demanded and received the keys of the town-house and public offices, appointed a landdrost (magistrate), and proceeded to make themselves at home in their newly-acquired territory.

The same thing occurred at Burghersdorp—except the flag fiasco—and in all the towns on the borders. Meanwhile, to the west of the Colony, Colonel Gough had been holding the station on the line at the Orange River ever since the war broke out. His camp was at Hopeton, which is in Cape Colony, just at the south-west corner of the Orange Free State, and he hoped to be able, from that position, to keep the railway line to the south clear. It was most important for the British to keep the line clear as far north as possible, because it was the direct route to Kimberley (and thence to Vryburg, and Mafeking, and Rhodesia) from Capetown. And, should the Free Staters drive the defending force south, so far could they tear up the rails and blow up bridges and culverts; thus retarding the advance of our troops, and delaying for a long time the relief of Kimberley.

And so Colonel Gough, the senior officer in that district, had established himself at the point where the railway runs across the Orange. At first, he had only some—and these a very few—irregular troops, together with those companies of the 1st Loyal North Lancashire Regiment that had not been sent as garrison to Kimberley; but, at the end of October, he received reinforcements from the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers, and a couple of squadrons of the 9th Lancers, as well as a battery of Field Artillery. Gough lost no time in mounting some of his infantry, so that he had two companies of mounted infantry, in addition to the cavalry for scouting.

The second week in November, it occurred to Gough to try to find out something of the numbers and position of the enemy to the north, between himself and Kimberley. So, on the 9th, he sent out—at night—the two batteries, the two

squadrons of Lancers, and a company and a half of mounted infantry. These were to push north, and reconnoitre. They set off in the direction of Belmont, a place on the railway line about twelve miles north of Orange River Station. The march was a silent one, and careful, searching the ground for the enemy. They did not make for Belmont itself, but a little to the west of it; and, after marching some fifteen miles, they found what they had come to look for.

The little party had only come to survey the ground, and see what sort of position the enemy held, and with how many men and guns, so as to be ready to report to the leader of the Kimberley Relief Column when that column arrived. The reconnaissance was in charge of one of the officers of the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers, Captain Keith Falconer, a brave officer of high promise, who had been given the brevet rank of Lieutenant-Colonel.

The force advanced warily, patrols of Lancers and mounted infantry being thrown out in advance of the main body; and, on the morning of the 10th, a patrol came upon the enemy at a point some nine miles west of Belmont. It was soon seen that they held a position of some strength. There was a huge plateau, to begin with. The plateau, or flat ground at the top of a hill or range of hills, is a distinctive geographical feature in South Africa—the celebrated Table Mountain, just outside Cape Town, is such a plateau. Here there was one; and at the north end of it was a great semi-circular ridge, standing boldly out into the table-land. This ridge, a steep one, was, from its position and formation, a very easy place to hold—in fact, a place quite ideal. Troops attacking it would be compelled, whichever way they came from—the front or either flank—to advance over the plateau, the flatness of which would afford them no cover. And this flatness would, moreover, render it impossible for them to conceal their numbers, or the direction of their attack, from the defenders of the ridge.

To add to the formidable character of the position, there were in front, stretching all along the length of the ridge, small kopjes, which might be used as outworks for the defence of the main position.

Besides this, the ridge was not commanded by any other point in the neighbourhood. There was no other spot to which one could climb and see into the Boer position. The only thing to be done now, having seen as much of the position as possible, was to try to discover the laager, and to make the enemy show his hand a little; for a reconnaissance which only discovers the position of the foe is worth very little. An intelligent scout can find that. And the only thing to be done was to make a feint attack.

So the two squadrons of Lancers wheeled round on the left wing, and made for the ridge. The battery was in the same part of the field—*i.e.* on the left—but kept well back. They wanted to draw the fire of the enemy's artillery on them, but there was no object in exposing the gunners to a rifle fire. Meanwhile the mounted infantry rode well round to the right, dismounted, and advanced, as though to make an attack on the enemy's left flank.

Skirmishing order was used in the advance — which means that first one line runs, creeps, or crawls up for a few yards; and, lying down behind such protective cover as it can find, opens fire. Meantime another line has come up. The men of the second line pass between the men of the firing line, as far ahead as

A HOT CORNER.

circumstances dictate, and then they lie down and blaze away. As soon as they are well down, the line which first advanced comes forward again, passes in its turn through the gaps in the now front line, and gains another few yards ; and so on, the lines advancing alternately. For many reasons, a skirmishing line is always widely spread out. The spaces between the men vary from one to sixteen yards.

Naturally a line spread out like this is less likely to suffer loss than is a line closely packed ; and, moreover, you must spread skirmishers out wide, or else the rearmost line might hit some of the men in front.

No sooner had our men started this movement than lead began to spatter round them. There were no volleys, no simultaneous discharges, but the ridge seemed to become alive with rifles, each viciously emitting lead at a great rate. The cavalry received extra attention, for a big gun opened on the two squadrons from a point well behind the ridge. Now was the time for the Royal Artillery to show its quality. In a trice breeches are opened, shell and powder-charge pushed in, and for the first time British guns wake the echoes of this solitude.

Shell after shell our men throw into the position. Some they direct at the spot where the Boer gun appears to be—the gun that is shelling the Lancers. Others they drop in just over the crest of the ridge, to ask the riflemen how they like it. For three hours the fighting continues. The cavalry sweep round the ridge, and then see, some three miles away, the laager of the Free Staters. They now know four things: (1) That the enemy is in pretty strong force, and quite wide awake ; (2) that the position held by them is a strong one, strongly fortified ; (3) that there is artillery there ; (4) where the Boer camp, or laager, is. But the Dutchmen are much too wily to show their whole hand. They do not permit one little bit of a man to be seen, and they only fire one cannon ; so that it is impossible to say whether they have one or five thousand men, or the numbers of the guns.

To draw them a little more, the mounted infantry makes a rush on foot on the right. The Boers blaze away viciously, but do not show. It is really wonderful, considering the excellent position occupied by the enemy, that our men do not suffer heavy loss ; but they do not. For more than an hour no one is touched ; and then Keith-Falconer, incautiously raising himself to lead a rush, topples over. They pick him up, lifeless. There seemed a fate upon the British officers in the early part of the war ; for in this skirmish, which lasted for three hours, only one man was killed, and he the leader of the party. There was a touch of sadness about this more than usual. Yet it is a thing that happens not seldom. The officers of our army will march or ride in the front—they will not doff their glittering lace and sword-hilts. The mere carrying of a sword instead of a rifle is enough to mark out the officer.

And so, until the generals commanding compelled the putting off of these useless and dangerous insignia of rank, our officers suffered terribly. For, it should be noticed, the Boers were not only able to tell at a glance officers from privates, but their marksmen were actually assisted to kill our leaders ; for the best possible kind of target is something which stands out from its surroundings—a silver button, a bright metal buckle, anything upon which the sharpshooter can readily lay the sight of his rifle.

To our absurd customs poor Keith-Falconer fell a victim. Here was an officer who had shown signs of great promise, who might have proved a valuable help in the days to come, offered up on the shrine of military glitter and display.

For three hours the fight, or rather skirmish, continued. The Boer position was too strong and too well defended for an assault to be made on it, and so the reconnoitrers returned to camp at the Orange River. Three other officers and privates had been wounded, and one, Lieutenant Wood, of the Loyal North Lancashires, who was twice hit by bullets, once in the head and once in the chest, afterwards died. The demonstration had small results. It was of very little use to make a reconnaissance against such a foe as this with the object of discovering his numbers, unless it was intended to attack immediately afterwards.

The reconnoitrers might report, with perfect accuracy, "Position so-and-so. Held by about 700 men." And if you went to attack the following day, even, you would find the post held by 7,000 rifles. Whatever defect the Boers, as a fighting force, may have had, they had one virtue: they could move.

Colonel Gough's little force was occasionally increased, until Orange River became a considerable camp; but, until the arrival of reinforcements from England, the north of the colony was in a bad way. The enemy everywhere rode about as masters of the country, and every day increased the difficulties in store for the British forces which should be sent against them. They gathered in recruits on every hand; they fortified places of natural strength, such as Stormberg and Colesberg and Belmont, to the intent that for as long as possible, the British should be made to conduct the campaign south of the river, and not in the Orange Free State.

Stories were rife at that time of the Boers' inability to stand a campaign for more than a month or two, of their crops rotting in the fields, and so on. Whether the authorities ever paid any attention to these rumours, we do not know. Probably not. Never was gossip more conjectural. Undoubtedly at that time the Free Staters and Transvaalers alike

MAJOR SCOTT-TURNER.
KILLED AT KIMBERLEY.

had resolved, as we had, to see the matter through to the end.

As for their crops and their cattle, the absence of the burghers made only a slight difference on the farms; for the Boer is not a labourer — he is a farmer. He does not work with his hands: he employs Kaffirs to do all that. And when the farmer and his sons were away at the wars, the farmer's wife and daughters (who could handle a rifle themselves if need be) usually managed to superintend the work of the farmstead just as comfortably and profitably as their lords and masters could have done.

There were many of these same wives and daughters who came to the wars. They lived in the laager, and, when the day was over, and the husband or father or brother or son came into camp after a fight or a skirmish or a hard day's scouting, he usually found a rough, substantial meal of meat waiting for him. These sturdy members of the gentler sex nursed the wounded, cheered the faint-hearted, fed the hungry. And it was said by those who knew the Boers well that the women, like the wives of those Teutons whom the great Roman encountered, cheered, almost hounded on the warriors to the fray.

They were not such an incumbrance, either, as might have been supposed. Placed in a laager at the back of the fighting line—generally some three to five miles—timely warning was sent if a retreat was contemplated. The Amazons would promptly strike the tents, pack everything up on the waggons, and be off. In this they were assisted by Kaffirs, of whom a large number were always on hand to assist with the transport and other work of that nature. Should the pursuit become hot, and waggon pace too slow, every woman of them could ride just as well as any man. Had she not almost from her infancy been used to have a pony of her own to ride about upon? And had she not, further, been used to taking long rides such as no other woman, except, perhaps, an Australian, would dream of?

Reinforcements began to arrive in Cape Town early in November, and the first of them had to be sent to Natal, where there was more pressing danger. On the 5th of November General French had arrived at De Aar, and had taken command there. Lord Methuen was selected to go to the west, on the road to Kimberley; and General Gatacre was sent to Queenstown. Lord Methuen arrived with his staff only at Orange River Station on the 12th of November. And General Gatacre, with reinforcements, was at Queenstown five days later.

Gatacre, a man from whom much was expected, made a characteristic speech to his troops. He exhorted the regulars to watch the irregular forces, who knew the country, and to learn from them the habits of the Boers and the way to meet their tactics. He expressed his confidence in his command, and declared that when a move forward was made there would be no stopping. And he finished by saying, "I will never ask you to do anything which I am not willing to do myself." This came well from the man who, in the Soudan, marched on foot with the troops, while an orderly led his horse. And the troops cheered. "But," said one of them, "'tain't everybody wot's made o' steel and leather like old Back-acher."

Confidence was now restored to the loyalist population, as well it might be, by the imposing presence of two divisions of British troops. Desertions to the enemy were fewer, and people ceased to fly south.

It was not long before French made a move. He was given a division of cavalry and other mounted troops, which he concentrated at De Aar, where there was already a small force—the force that had retired from Naauwpoort on the 9th. On the 18th of November the silent general felt himself strong enough to go forward, and forward he went. Next day he re-occupied Naauwpoort, and at once began to scour the country in order to get in touch with the enemy. The Boers held Colesberg in force, but they had an advanced post at Arundel, where there are hills admirably adapted to their style of warfare.

It was on the 23rd of November that our forces first came under fire. That day, one company of the famous Black Watch, a section of about thirty Mounted Infantry, a dozen of the Cape Mounted Police, and a troop of the magnificent Australian riders, the New South Wales Lancers, set out in the direction of Colesberg in an armoured train, French himself in command. The reconnoitring force started at sunrise from the camp, and proceeded cautiously along. Care was necessary, because the general more than half anticipated that he would find the railway cut up not very far ahead. Just before Arundel, a place about half way between Naauwpoort and Colesberg, no enemy and no trace of one having yet been seen, rifles suddenly spoke out from the hills, and the bullets whizzed most unpleasantly over and pattered against the sides of the armoured train. Three of our men were wounded, and then it became evident that the enemy were moving round towards the line to try to cut off the retreat of the train.

A word of command, and out tumbled the Australians with their horses. Now these men could ride and scout and skirmish as well as the Boers themselves, and this the Dutchmen soon discovered to their cost. The New South Wales Lancers pretty soon asserted themselves, and drove the enemy back to his hills, holding him there while the train went a few miles further up the line. Here they found rails torn up and removed, and so turned back. There was nothing in the skirmish or reconnaissance worthy of record except that this was the first time in the war that any of our Australian cousins were under fire.

More were soon to arrive, and, ere long, to prove their skill and their valour—to cause the land of their birth and the Motherland, too, to be proud of them. For of all the troops to earn distinction in this war, none gained more glory than the volunteer troops of Australia.

There were now in Cape Colony three army divisions. One, under General Sir William Gatacre, at Queenstown, having opposed to it a Boer force with its base at Bethulie in the Free State; but the force itself had advanced to and occupied Burghersdorp on November 15th, and was advancing on Stormberg, while Gatacre was moving on to Putter's Kraal to meet them.

The silent cavalryman with his cavalry division had his base at De Aar; and had against him a Boer force resting on Donkerspoort as its base. They had moved into the Colony; and apparently intended to pitch their main camp at Colesberg. French had gone to Naauwpoort to meet them.

In the Colony, also, was a third division under General Lord Methuen, moving up from Cape Town to Kimberley. These were at Orange River.

Gatacre was farthest south and east. French was about 130 miles to the north-

DAWN AFTER THE BATTLE.

west of him (more west than north). And Methuen was about 120 miles north-west of French (more north than west). The plan of campaign was for French and Gatacre to drive back into the Free State the commandoes opposed to them, for Lord Methuen to relieve the Kimberley garrison; and then, operating on the three lines, for Gatacre and French to push on to Bloemfontein from the south, while Methuen came in upon it from the west.

It will be necessary now for some time to consider the operations of each of the three divisions separately; because, in fact, during the whole of November and December of 1899 and January of 1900 they acted independently. Suffice it to say, for the present, that in about the last week of November there appeared every prospect that two or three weeks would see Kimberley relieved and the Boers driven back across the frontier. The people at home thought so. The Colonists thought so. The Army thought so. And all these persons expressed themselves loudly to that effect.

But there was in the fighting line a short, grizzled, silent cavalryman, who said nothing. It would be very interesting to know what he thought.

BLOEMFONTEIN.
(Photo: B. W. Caney, Durban.)

CHAPTER XV.

THE SIEGE OF MAFEKING.

AND how fared gallant little Mafeking in these troublous times?

We left Baden-Powell and his tiny garrison just as that wily person had scored the first trick with the dynamite which he "thought would be safer outside the town." The next morning at daybreak the whole force was up and moving. There were some active men amongst that garrison—and none more so than Lord Charles Bentinck, Lieutenant Fitzclarence, and Lord Edward Cecil, D.S.O., the soldier-son of the Marquis of Salisbury. He had served his apprenticeship in the Soudan under Kitchener the Sirdar, and was a promising pupil of that general who never made mistakes. Lord Edward had all the insouciant cheerfulness of the young English aristocrat of the roving type; and he never got excited.

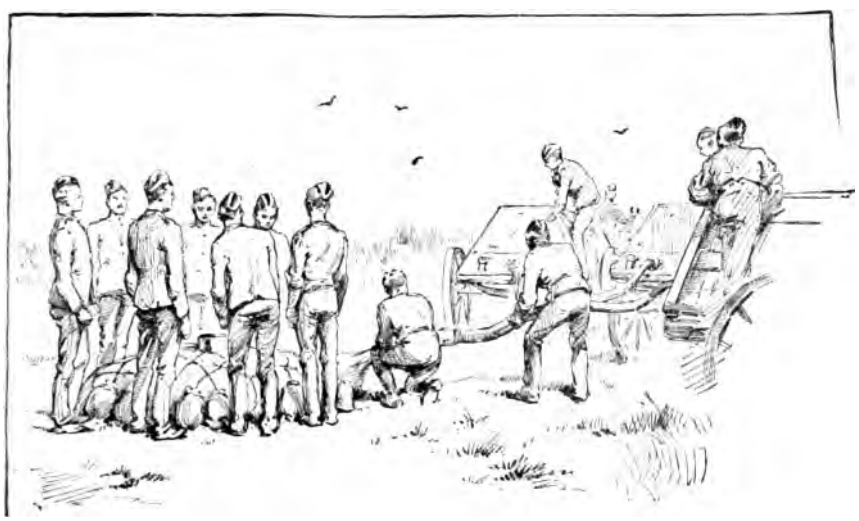
The officers in Mafeking were what is known as "special service" men. When the Government has work to be done which involves a departure from the ordinary military routine, it selects an enterprising officer or two for the purpose. In this case, irregular regiments had to be formed; and a town had to be defended under exceptional circumstances. For that reason men of special abilities and temperament had been dispatched to Mafeking. There is nothing in the world so gratifying to an officer as to be sent on this kind of undertaking.

Fortunately, there are in the British army many men qualified for the numberless queer jobs required of them. Where else in the world would you have found a set who could train the timid Egyptian up to the point of facing and conquering the warlike tribes of the Soudan? Has the Chinese army ever been able to fight as well as when Gordon led it? Think of the special service of the men who have raised and trained the Queen's Indian army. For special service a man must have great powers of organisation, supreme confidence in himself, and that which the Irishman calls "a way wid him"—the knack of making people believe in his ability and resourcefulness. These qualities were, perhaps, never better exemplified than in the case of that Nicholson whom the wild tribes of Northern India worshipped as the God-sahib. Baden-Powell and his lieutenants also possessed them in an eminent degree.

The actual siege of Mafeking—that is, the actual time when the town was closely invested by the Boer forces—dated from October 14th. It was known in the town that General Cronje commanded the burghers. Now, if there was one man in the whole Transvaal whom the British colonist hated and feared more than any other it was Cronje. He it was who starved out, and continued to fire on, the garrison of Potchefstroom when he had notice of the armistice in his pocket in 1881. He was reported to have advised the shooting wholesale of the Jameson Raiders. In short, he was reported to be stern to cruelty, vindictive to barbarity. Doubtless, he was much

maligned. Certainly we have never been able to discover any evidence that Cronje was either more or less than a stern soldier, a hard and resolute fighting man. That he was courageous subsequent events amply proved. That he was not altogether inhuman the wounded and prisoners who fell into his hands abundantly testified. It is a trite saying that you cannot make war with bon-bons. It is another that rumour invariably lies.

They went partly to see what the enemy might be doing, partly also to cause him a little annoyance if they should get the opportunity. At about a quarter past five (a.m.) a considerable party of Boers hove in sight. They outnumbered Bentinck's men by at least five to one. The defenders began to show some of the excitement that is to be expected from men who have never been under fire, and have not had the disciplinary advantages of the regular soldier.



FILLING A BALLOON

At the same time, the British in Mafeking firmly believed Cronje to be the one general of the Boers most to be dreaded, at once for his vigorous ability and his unwavering cruelty; and Baden-Powell had to reckon with this feeling. He had successfully played a trick on the enemy. Now he resolved to strike a blow such as would show his men that neither the Boers nor their leader were anything very terrible after all. So on the morning of the 14th, Captain Lord Charles Bentinck took out a patrol of the Protectorate regiment to the north of the town.

"Steady, men! Reserve your fire! Dismount! Magazine! Ready!" The men, most of them shaking with excitement, slip cartridges into their rifles. They are only about 1,500 yards away now. Let's try them with a volley. "At 1,500! Present! Fire!"

The one Boer who falls is claimed by everybody as his! The Boers halt now and dismount, and proceed to try their brand new Mausers. But they seem unused to the weapons. Some say it is because the sights of the rifles are calculated in metres, whereas the Dutch

South African is accustomed to compute distance by yards. At all events, they make precious bad practice, and the Protectorate men are much encouraged thereby. For half an hour individual snipe-shooting goes on, but no more damage is done, except to one Boer horse. Still, the Britishers' fire is too close to be pleasant, and after a little of it the invaders retire to a safe distance.

Meanwhile the rifle cracks have been heard in the town. The garrison turns out under arms, and the commander promptly orders out a party to reinforce Bentinck.

Now there is in Mafeking a little colony of railway men, mostly British born—all of British nationality; and these have been reinforced recently by various other signalmen and pointsmen and other railway officers from various places on the line, both north and south. It should be said that nearly all the South African railways are manned by Englishmen and Scotsmen, and in the Dutch localities they form separate little colonies; and, curiously enough, they are not enamoured of the Boers. They have, therefore, formed a railway corps to help in the defence of the town, not only by working armoured trains and such like, but also by fighting with the rest.

In fifteen minutes from the alarm being given these men have run out an armoured train of three trucks, and in another five it is manned and on the move. Captain Williams and Lieutenant More are in command: the one an officer from Rhodesia—a British South Africa Police-man, an employé of the Chartered Company; the other, of the railway volunteers. The "crew," as those who man these trains are called, numbers between forty and fifty men of the B.S.A. Police, the town guard, and the railway volunteers. The police, at all events, can shoot; most of them know what fighting is, and they seem to like it. Besides rifles, the armament comprises two Maxims and a Hotchkiss gun. The Hotchkiss, like the Maxim, loads automatically.

Up steam! Let her go! And amid cheers from their comrades, the little band moves out. Soon they reach the patrol; but by that time the Boers have discreetly retired. Shouts greet the train: "They're about two miles farther on." "Pitch into them." "You needn't be afraid of them—they can't shoot for nuts!" "Did you bag any?" "Only one, and one horse. No; no loss here." "Wish we were coming! Good-bye!"

"Not too fast, driver; these are such artful beggars. They may have loosened the rails, or laid a mine. Oh, a little faster than that!"

In a few minutes the enemy is sighted. "Now you can clap on steam." The crew man the loopholes and train the Maxims. The ground is pretty open hereabouts; not too much cover for them. Boom! Bang! Oh! they've got a big gun here, have they. Well, keep her moving up and down the line, driver. Never stop for a moment; and go at different rates of speed. That will spoil their calculations. So the train cruises up and down the line—now fast, now slow. Sometimes she nearly stands still, and then shoots off at a great rate; and a shell drops where she was a minute ago. Mauser bullets patter, patter on the trucks; but who cares for that? They may come to within fifty yards and fire if they like; but we shouldn't like to be hit by a shell.

The firing is not all on one side. The Lee-Enfields speak frequently. The Maxims keep up their "irritating stammer."

"SHELLS!" A COMMON SIGHT IN MAFEKING.

The Hotchkiss barks. It bites, too. The train party is enjoying itself amazingly. Barring the chance of a shell blowing them all up, or derailing the train, they are perfectly safe; and they have got the range; and the Boers have hardly any cover; and the Lee-Enfields and the machine guns rake the besiegers' ranks time and time again. And, luckily, the shells did not hit the mark.

Suddenly, splinters of lead fly about inside the leading carriage. A stray Mauser bullet has come flying through the Maxim-gun opening, and has hit an iron

bar. It breaks into a thousand splinters, and two of the crew are hit; not hurt much, however.

The Boers do not like this style of fighting. The method they enjoy is that which affords them plenty of cover, and their opponents little. And here the boot is very much on the other foot. Parties have to lie down on the open veldt. The Maxims and the Hotchkiss are trained down on them. Whenever one raises his head to fire, he becomes the target for the rifles sticking out of the loopholes. And the result is that the burghers lose heavily.

"B.-P." has been in communication with the train all the while; and now he thinks it time to end the skirmish. But he wishes to give some others of his levies their baptism of fire, and so he orders out a squadron of the Bechuanaland Protectorate Regiment, Captain Fitzclarence leading, to cover the retirement of the train. Out moved "A" Squadron. They were a fine set of men, without a fault as Irregular troops, fighting on much the same principles as the Boers themselves—that is, using horses for locomotion, but fighting as infantry. Most of them had a good knowledge of the rifle; and they afterwards proved that, like all fighting men of British blood, they could handle the bayonet.

"A" Squadron advanced; and, as it advanced, the train retired to meet it. The Protectorate men came up on the right of the railway line; and, as they appeared, the Boers plucked up heart again. Here were men in the open, not demons behind armour-plate. The squadron moved off to the right to get in touch with the foe. The foe is not idle; for, seeing the smallness of Fitzclarence's numbers, he tries to outflank him. The effect of this manœuvre is to make the squadron split in two, which is the special advantage of a flanking movement.

For the information of any readers who are not *au fait* with military terms, we may say that a flank movement is the sending of a party to the side of the enemy. Thus, if your enemy is facing north, you send out a force to attack him from the east or west. He has to turn part of his force round to that side; and, if your movement is made quickly, you can work havoc with him while his men are thus changing front. "Front," in military parlance, is the direction of the foe.

Of course, you can rarely make a flanking movement unless you have a superiority in numbers, because you must try to keep up a hot attack in front while your flanking body moves round. This is to keep the enemy's hands full. Again, if your enemy can move about much faster than you can, it is difficult to outflank him; because, as soon as he sees your force coming up in the new direction, he moves men to meet it—that is, he forms a new "front." And, if he can get his men there before your flankers are within striking distance, your flank attack becomes merely a frontal attack on another "front." The Boers were very difficult to outflank, because, being all mounted, they could form a new front much faster than our footmen were able to attack them on the flank.

In this particular case, Captain Fitzclarence foiled their little game, for his men, too, were mounted, and could move as fast as the Boers could. The train was now in a position to retire safely. But the Protectorate squadron was not. The squadron was holding its own, and perhaps a little more; but several men went down. The Boers were losing much more

heavily, for the British volunteers took advantage of every atom of cover, and fired with a steadiness quite astonishing. One Dutchman was for some time a thorn in the side. He had hit three men in about half an hour—much more than his proper share. At last, two of "A" Squadron watched for him; and as he showed a bit of his head they both drew trigger at once. Presumably one of them reached the mark, for the farmer's deadly rifle was silent thenceforth.

Baden-Powell was watching operations from the town, and he decided that matters had gone quite far enough. So he sent a dispatch rider to Fitzclarence with the order to retire. Major Baillie, the correspondent of the London *Morning Post*, tried to carry the message. But, as he galloped along, he found himself within point-blank range of the Mausers. His horse was hit, and he himself escaped only by a hair's-breadth, and he was obliged to seek refuge in the armoured train. At last, however, a messenger managed to run the gauntlet, only to be told that without help a retirement would mean heavy loss and the leaving behind of the wounded.

Baden-Powell promptly sent out Lord Charles Bentinck with his squadron. Even with this reinforcement our men were outnumbered; but they were able to make a better show. The enemy had taken possession of a Kaffir kraal, and thence—for it gave them cover—poured in their hottest fire. But the Protectorate men were too good for them. Much to the amazement of everybody on the British side, it soon appeared that our citizen levies shot better, and "more wholly together" than the dreaded marksmen from the South African Republic. And the Boers discovered it, too. For in about an hour after the arrival of the reinforcements the Kaffir kraal was deserted.

Now was the time to retreat. A dozen B.S.A. Police, unarmed, descended from the train with an ambulance bearing the Red Cross, and picked up the wounded. Being informed that there were two left on the field nearer the Boer position, they advanced, and were saluted with a hot fire. General Cronje afterwards inquired whether that fire had hurt anybody. If so, he said, he would hang by the neck the man who instigated it. It was fortunate for somebody that no one had been touched, for Cronje was very much a man of his word.

And so the little force retired, the wounded safe within the shelter of the armoured train, the Protectorate squadrons on their horses; sometimes facing round and delivering volleys when the enemy tried to press. At last, within a mile of the town, the Boers ceased from troubling, and at noon the whole force was safe within the walls of Mafeking; and the rest of the garrison, volunteers and Mafekingers, cheered them, for they had well upheld the honour of their country. The only loss was of two men killed, and one officer and fourteen men wounded.

The skirmish had a splendid effect on the garrison. It made everybody feel that the force besieging them would never take the town by force of arms; that Baden-Powell was a match for Cronje or Snyman, or any other commandant of them all, whether for fighting, or for guile. And didn't they cheer him when he rode out in his shirt-sleeves, and simply said "Well done, men!" That night—a Saturday—an order was issued commending the squadrons of Fitzclarence and Bentinck, and the crew of the armoured train, for

SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE ON A NIGHT MARCH.

their courage and coolness. Now praise from B.-P. was indeed praise.

When an enemy attacks a town, it not unusually does so almost as soon as it arrives, and in the night. The idea is that the besieged may not have become used to night work, and that their fortifications may not be so strong as they will afterwards be made. So all that night, and until sunrise the next day, sentries and patrols kept vigilant watch, and the armoured train moved up and down the line. The watch was fruitless, however, for no assault was delivered, and on Sunday all was peace and quietness.

One of the strangest features of this siege was the agreement between besiegers and besieged for an armistice on Sundays. For four months during that investment no shot was fired on either side on a Sunday. The Boers held divine service in their laagers ; while in Mafeking the day was devoted to worship and to recreation. The Sabbath was, in fact, very much like Sunday on the Continent. There were concerts, and luncheon parties, and cricket matches—sometimes football, despite the broiling sun. There can be no doubt that this one day in seven, when men and women could walk about freely, helped in a great measure to keep the garrison cheerful. On the first Sunday evening of the siege (October 15th) the residents gave a musical party, with a dance afterwards, at one of the hotels, and wound up a lively evening by singing "God Save the Queen" in such tones that the chorus woke up the early-to-bed Boers camping out on the veldt.

After the day of rest the business of the siege was begun with punctuality and despatch ; for at 9 o'clock on Monday morning the first shell burst in the town. Then the inhabitants began to be glad their commander had made provision of the completest kind against attack. When shells begin to burst, and you have no idea where the next one will drop, a bomb-proof shelter is comforting. Then B.-P. had arranged a system of signals. Native boys of good eyesight and look-out men with telescopes gave warning when the shelling appeared to be about to begin ; an alarm bell would be rung, and everybody would retire to his sand-bag shelter, or his trench, or his cave, or whatever might be the particular protection apportioned to him.

For several hours the bombardment continued. Common shell and shrapnel buzzed and whistled in the air. But at the end of the day the commander despatched his famous message: "Bombarded four hours. One dog killed." One dog killed! The working man in the streets of London bought his ha'penny paper and read the laconism ; and he roared, and observed that "this 'ere Baden-Powell must be a rum bloke." The joke flew all over the United Kingdom ; it travelled round the world wherever the Union Jack waved, wherever the Stars and Stripes flew. And the heart of the whole race warmed to that imperturbable man in far-off Bechuanaland ; for he had a sense of humour.

In the afternoon arrived a messenger with a white flag. He approached the British lines, and stated that he had come from General Snyman. "Then I think we'll blindfold you." And blindfolded he was, and thus led into the town. Arrived there, he was informed that Colonel Baden-Powell was asleep, but would be awakened ; and soon the colonel appeared. The emissary stated his message. It was this : We are here in great force, with artillery, and we give you the chance to surrender now, to avoid further

bloodshed. "Bloodshed?" remarked B.-P., with a puzzled expression. "Ask General Snyman when the bloodshed is going to begin. What? Give us a chance to cease firing now? Thank you; I was not aware that we had begun." Which was a fact, for during all that terrific bombardment when the dog met his untimely end, not one British gun had spoken. You didn't catch Baden-Powell wasting valuable ammunition.

Would the envoy have lunch? Yes, he didn't mind if he did. So he stayed and ate what was, as likely as not, the best meal he had ever had in his life, the viands excellent and plentiful, the wine abundant. Then his eyes were bandaged once again, and he returned to tell his commandant that this Englander was about the queerest, coolest, maddest man he ever saw in his life. And the story of the Boer's reception, and of the Englishman's conversation with him, soon was noised abroad in Mafeking. And the men of the garrison shook their heads and their sides too, and said, "Snyman won't get much change out of old B.-P."

On one subject, however, Colonel Baden-Powell had spoken gravely to the emissary, and that was the shelling of a convent in the town notwithstanding that the Red Cross flag flew over the building. In this case, the besiegers were not so much to blame for the dropping of an occasional shell in the wrong place. It was simply bad gunnery. There seemed to be no German gunners with these commandoes, and the native Boer cannoneer was not a highly finished article. So ended the first day's bombardment. Two shells in the convent. One in Rieslé's Hotel. Casualties as before mentioned.

For the next day or two intermittent shells dropped in the town, while the defenders did nothing. In fact, not until Friday night, when a small party of police went out on a quiet sortie. It was as much a scouting party as anything else, and the only thing it found out was that the Boers were on the look-out, and had a machine gun handy. There was some blazing away in the dark, and that was all.

On Sunday General Cronje sent in another request for surrender. He had, he said, some big guns on the way up, and he was most anxious to avoid further bloodshed. There were, he continued, too many Red Cross flags flying in the town. There ought only to be one. He suggested that the British commander should remove the women and children to a place of safety. He gave notice that early in the morning he would bombard the place.

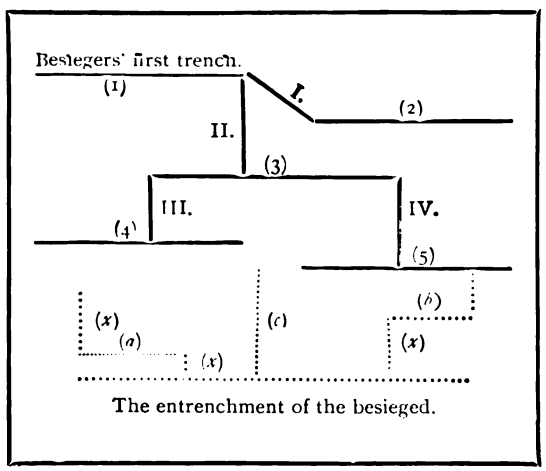
The colonel was not behindhand in his reply. "If you bombard the town you only create a precedent for our forces when we invade your country. I only ask you to respect the Red Cross on the hospital and convent. You will see a yellow flag floating over one of the buildings in the town. That building is the gaol. It is chiefly tenanted by your own countrymen, and you can shell it or not, as you please. And by way of thanks for your warning I give you notice that this little town is surrounded by mines—cordite and dynamite. Some go off if you tread on them, others explode when I touch a button in my room. Farewell! My very kind regards and best thanks for your courtesy."

Altogether a most polite enemy, this Cronje! And he met a polished opponent in the colonel of Dragoons.

The Boer commandant was hardly as good as his word; for although he did pitch a shell or two into the town very early on Monday he did it only, apparently, as a

guarantee of good faith. Most of Monday he spent in pushing his trenches closer to the town.

It is done this way :—You start at, say, 5,000 yards from the outermost trench of the besieged, and you make a trench. Then the next night or the next day you get in a little nearer by digging a trench a few hundred yards to the left or right front of your first trench, what time riflemen in the first trench, and gunners, keep the besieged back by their fire. Roughly, the drawing herewith would represent the work as it proceeds.



THE ART OF TRENCH CONSTRUCTION.

The long dotted line represents the defenders. The black lines represent the besiegers gradually pushing up their trenches as depicted by 2, 3, 4, and 5. Each of these (2, 3, 4, and 5) represents a trench pushed forward while the working party is covered by, and can, if necessary, retire to the trench immediately behind. Thus, while making (2) they are covered by (1); while making (3), by (1) and (2). They dig "traverses" (I., II., III., IV.) to allow of communication between trenches. If the besiegers are allowed to continue this pushing up of trenches, in a very short time they will push them very close to the town, and so have rows of riflemen under cover who can snipe at close range.

To prevent such a result the besieged push out trenches (*a*), (*b*), and (*c*), and traverses (*x*) to meet the others, in order that they may give the working parties a hot time at closer range, also in order to break an assault. Night sorties are also frequently resorted to. The besiegers' advanced trenches are rushed in the darkness, their trenching tools carried off or destroyed, their workmen killed, their trenches filled in. Again, the besieged shell working parties, as far as they are able, so as to protract, even if they cannot altogether prevent, their labours.

So on Monday, the 23rd of October, when Cronje got up from Pretoria two 100 lb. siege guns, he proceeded to build a gun platform on a hill overlooking the town. The Britishers promptly established themselves on a hill (called Cannon Kopje) which they had entrenched, and threw shrapnel into the workers. So Cronje only got his siege guns into position the next day, and that by dint of working all night. The field guns made it far too warm for him to work in the daytime. In fact, his sappers fled from the shrapnel; which cheered the Mafekingers so that they rejoiced aloud. But on Tuesday the gun platform was built, and then the little town began to know what a bombardment was really like. The field guns of the Boers were silenced easily enough by our own, but we had nothing to cope with the two 100-pounders and the heavy Krupp siege gun just placed in position.

Slowly, with ponderous gravity, 100-pound shells soared aloft and fell into the town. Did one fall in an open space, such as the great market square, its explosion made the inhabitants feel as though the earth itself had exploded from its centre. Earth and iron and lead flew through the air. The dwellers in these parts knew well the horrid dust-devil; now they were to become familiarised with the lead-and-iron-devil. For in addition to the great projectiles of the 100-pounder, rifles and machine guns at 2,000 and field guns at 4,000 yards poured lead and iron into the town. A favourite device of the invaders was to pretend they were about to attack the town under cover of their artillery, but they did not come within a mile. The feints were useful to them, however, in that they compelled the garrison to stand to arms instead of hiding in the bomb-proof shelters.

So matters continued until towards the end of the second week. The Boers were now pushing forward their trenches, and it became time to interrupt them. So on Friday night (27th of October) Colonel Baden-Powell resolved on a sortie. It was to be a thorough-going British affair—none of your long range rifle battles, but a real fight, a hand-to-hand encounter with the bayonet. The wily Colonel told nobody of his plan until after dark, but at about half-past-seven p.m. he sent an order to Fitzclarence to parade a squadron of the Protectorate Regiment and two companies of the Cape Police. Great was the competition; for the men smelled fight. The squadron which had the honour was "D" squadron, which paraded smartly half an hour after the order given. The police were merely to go as supports, to reinforce if need be, or to cover the retirement should one be necessary. This would make an assaulting party of between fifty and sixty, with twice the number of supports.

As soon as the little band paraded, B.-P. made them a short address. The attack was to be in absolute and solemn silence. There was to be no firing. None. But the squadron was to rush the trenches and try the cold steel. The only order to retire would be a peculiar note blown on a whistle. Baden-Powell had no intention of allowing his men to be befooled by imitation English bugle-calls or words of command. As this order was given every man stiffened himself up. Eyes gleamed and chests heaved, for at last British valour was to get its chance with its own weapon.

Shortly after eight, our men set out to the east, towards the racecourse, where were the trenches of the besiegers. It was pitch dark, but there was neither rain nor wind. Indeed, in the stillness it was wonderful that the enemy did not hear the footsteps of our men as they tramped over the level plain. But they did not hear; neither was their watch good. They never seemed to expect a night attack, which shows how little they knew the commander of Mafeking. Had they known him better it would have occurred to them to expect the very things that nobody would think of, if one may be pardoned the Hibernicism.

On! on! Surely we must be near them now. Yes. There is the first trench—not thirty yards away. Suddenly—"Andries! Piet!!" Someone has heard us, and has given the alarm. Too late! "Charge!" "Into them!" "Hooray!" Thrust straight; stab home with the point! These lads of yours, Captain Fitzclarence, may be new to the bayonet, but they make a wonderfully effective show. There is none of the prettiness of a sword attack. It is just thrust!

THE NIGHT ATTACK.

thrust! And if you touch your man, you go straight through him.

There are 600 Boers in that laager. You would think there were 6,000. They shriek and yell. Some seize their Mausers and Martinis and blaze away recklessly. Ho! ho! What's that? It sounds like a volley, and the Boers never fire volleys. It is the Cape Police. Murray, their commander, has led them round the flank, and they are now in position to sweep the rear Boer trenches without touching their comrades, who, now up to their elbows in blood, are driving that terrible little piece of steel through bone and muscle and sinew with all the vigour and strength of a stalwart Briton. Not a bayonet is stainless, and the sword of Fitzclarence bites deep and bites often.

The turmoil in the trenches is tremendous. The Boers even shoot some of their own men, though they occasionally hit one of ours. Fiercely the troopers smite and thrust, shouting and cheering as they plunge into the *mêlée*. For the enemy is now absolutely confined and huddled together. With no steel of their own, they are helpless at close quarters, and they seem to have no idea of how to use the butt-end of their guns. Ample is the vengeance taken for the week's bombardment; terrible the lesson taught. The Protectorate Regiment is composed of men of every nation in the British empire. Here arises the shout of an Englishman, there the grim yell of a Scot, and again the battle-shriek of a wild Irishman. They smite and slay for an hour till they are glutted with carnage.

The Boers have now had enough of it, and no longer resist the onslaught. Instead, they bolt to a distance, safe from bayonet thrust, and, lying down in their rear trenches, start a hot fusillade. With such a tiny force it is impossible for Fitzclarence to hold the entrenchments he has won, and he sounds his whistle for the "Retire." Quickly the sortie-party runs back over the level ground, the Boer bullets whistling around them. And here losses occur. Six men of the regiment bite the dust. Nevermore will they answer the roll-call. Another is mortally wounded, but, helped by his comrades, he struggles on. The police keep up their fire on the rear trenches for some time, to cover the backward movement, and in the early hours of the morning "D" squadron returns to the town. Two men have gone a-missing, six are dead, and nine are wounded, including Fitzclarence. But even the wounded bear themselves bravely. For they have proved to the Dutchmen that in hand-to-hand conflict the man of British race and blood is a terrible foe.

And they exhibit their bayonets to their comrades as a sure token that there has, indeed, been blood-letting. And in the Boer trenches all is wailing and lamentation, for half a hundred men have fallen to the steel, and half a hundred more to the rifles of the Cape Police and the Mausers of their own comrades.

On the morrow a party of our men is permitted to bring in the dead who fell in the retirement, and these are solemnly buried in the little cemetery. Yet, despite the sadness of the function, there is little melancholy in Mafeking that day.

Much of the heart seemed to be taken out of the besiegers by their experience of close fighting. At all events they shelled the town in only a half-hearted sort of way for the next few days. But on Monday, late in the afternoon, there arrived upon the scene some of the Transvaalers who had taken Vryburg. These were in a high state of excitement

about their exploits, and they raised the courage of their brethren to the sticking point. Nothing, they said, except the downfall of Mafeking now remained to be done in order to make Bechuanaland a Boer possession. They forgot wee Kuruman, but that was a detail. Let us, said the young bloods—young Cronje, the general's son, among them—"go for" this town and take it. These Englanders will not stand up to our rifles.

And so it was arranged that the town should be assaulted. Accordingly at sunrise the next morning young Cronje himself led a vehement attack upon the town. In order that you may understand the assault, let me tell you a little of the geography of Mafeking. The town is quite near (within a quarter of a mile) to the River Molopo, and north of that river—on the west, north, and east of the town—there is flat country, while on the south there are hills. These hills command the town, and therefore on one of them Sir Charles Warren had, many years before, built a fort, a circular stone erection never intended to resist the fire of big guns. Still there was a fort on Cannon Kopje, as this hill was called, and for some weeks Colonel Vyvyan, of the Engineers, had laboured to make it big-gun proof. Whatever might be its power of resistance to cannon fire, however, it was certain that the fort on Cannon Kopje was in a good position to be defended against infantry. Warren had seen, when he selected this hill for his fort, that this was the hill from which the town was dominated. Whoever held it had the town pretty much at his mercy. In other words, Cannon Kopje was the key of Mafeking.

General Cronje, himself no mean strategist, saw this, also; and, therefore, when he found his young bloods determined on an assault, directed their energies to Cannon Fort. "Take that," said he, "and Mafeking is ours; and, with it, Bechuanaland."

At half-past four in the morning of Tuesday (October 31st) the ball opened. It opened scientifically and according to the military Cocker, who says, "Before delivering an infantry attack on an entrenched position, first search the trenches well with artillery fire." He might have added, "and be very careful to see that the same trenches are not held by a squad of British South Africa Police." There was a small body—about sixty—of that stalwart force at the top of Cannon Kopje; and the searching of the artillery did not hurt them much. They did not like it, though, for all that. But there was one thought to sustain them. Every one of those sunburnt faces beamed through its tan when somebody observed: "The beggars are coming to attack us." They, too, wanted to see whether the Boers could fight at close quarters.

The Transvaalers came on quite scientifically, taking, of course, every advantage of cover; their guns dropping shrapnel on the fort meanwhile. Colonel Walford was in command on the kopje; and he showed himself worthy of being associated with Baden-Powell that day. Anybody can work when he has the means and the appliances. Show me the man who can do the work without the means and with inferior appliances! Walford was of that kind. He could not reply to the Boer artillery, for the guns were over two miles away—modern 15-pounders—and he had only one 7-lb. muzzle loader. So Colonel Walford did the best thing he could do. He did not try to reply. "But," said he, "they cannot carry this kopje at two miles. To take it they must send

infantry close up. Now, my poor old 7-pounder is good enough at short range, so I will save him for the attacking footmen." The cannon was not the only defence. There were two Maxims, also good for stopping infantry, though of no use against long-range artillery.

Young Piet Cronje's forces came boldly on. And Colonel Walford was enjoining the B.S.A. Police men not to waste their cartridges. "If you let them get near enough," he said, "you can't miss 'em." The police-men restrained themselves to admiration. Suddenly a whistle was blown; and with one tremendous crackle Cannon Kopje seemed to explode, and vomit itself in leaden bits upon the advancing foe. The 7-pounder is of some service. The Maxims go crackle-crackle, just as a leaf-laden holly branch will if you put it on the fire. The B.S.A. Police fire rapidly until the magazines are emptied.

"They're no' likin' the warmth o' their receeption!"—gleefully this is said by a gentleman who seems to come from Dumfries. He states afterwards that he is glad he joined the police because there seems to be plenty of active employment. His remark about the Boers and their reception is true enough, for there they are, breaking back to cover. They lie there for some time; sniping skilfully and viciously; and they hit some of ours, too, worse luck! There were one or two sharpshooters amongst them; and these set themselves to mark down the officers who, after the stupid British fashion, exposed themselves recklessly. Two, Captain Marsham and Captain Pechell, breathed their last on Cannon Kopje; and two non-commissioned men who took their places perished also. Of the rank and file, only two died—a comparatively small number, though there were several others wounded more or less severely.

While the enemy's infantry fired from cover, their artillery, one 100-pounder and four field guns, played steadily on the fort. But these were bomb-proof shelters, and the damage was trifling. Then Piet Cronje the younger and his storming party pushed up the kopje once more, crawling foot by foot as the manner of the Boers was, and keeping up a hot rifle-fire. But they met their match, and more. The B.S.A. Police did not disdain cover after the fashion of the Regular Infantry of the British army; and as a result they were better able to defend a position of this kind against a force vastly superior in numbers. For they took cover and used their rifles expertly, meeting the Transvaalers with their own tactics.

All morning the attack continued. The Dutchmen were brave and obstinate; and had they not been met with singular skill and tenacity they must have stormed the height. Time after time they nearly gained the fort; and time after time the fusillade drove them back. Finally they retired, bearing with them their dead and wounded, amongst the latter young Piet Cronje, the leader of the assault. Their loss was far heavier than ours, as the loss of an unsuccessful attacking force must always be; but ours was quite as heavy as the resources of the little garrison could bear. Well did the brave defenders deserve the praise of the commander—praise given spontaneously, as was Baden-Powell's wont. For a great captain must know how to praise as well as how to blame.

We will now leave the garrison of Mafeking, that we may glance at the main campaign again.

CHAPTER XVI.

FROM NICHOLSON'S NEK TO THE ARRIVAL OF REINFORCEMENTS—RECONNAISSANCES AND SKIRMISHES.

THE loss of the battalions at Nicholson's Nek and the failure of General White to break up and smash in detail the forces invading Natal put a serious complexion on the situation.

A KAFFIR CHIEF.
(*Photo: J. H. Murray, Pietermaritzburg.*)

The Boers at once began to pour more troops and more guns into that colony, and for a time it was seriously feared that they might succeed in raiding Pietermaritzburg and even Durban itself. In Ladysmith the situation was particularly serious. Up to the 30th of October the loyal inhabitants of that place were confident of the power of the British forces to cope with, and drive back any army that the Boers could bring against them. But now that confidence was rudely dispelled. It became apparent that, so far from our troops being able to take the offensive, Sir George White would have his hands full in holding the town. A siege was inevitable

Already, even on the 30th, the enemy could be seen moving round between the camp and Colenso, and it was only a question of hours how long they would be before they gained possession of the railway line south of Ladysmith. Besides the danger involved in the cutting off of General White's force from its real base — the sea, there was another very real and very urgent peril. Should the enemy gain the railway, there was, at that moment, no force between Ladysmith and Pietermaritzburg capable of stopping them if they chose to advance on the capital; and the capital was almost defenceless.

Seeing this, Sir George White acted

while there was yet time. The Dublin Fusiliers, who had been on the right, guarding the camp and town, were rushed into a train and sent down to Colenso, on the south of the Tugela River, so that they might check raiding parties and hold the enemy at bay until reinforcements could arrive. A battalion of the Border Regiment was due to arrive from Malta ere long, and in a week's time probably some of the transports of the First Army Corps would sight Cape Town.

There were at Colenso at the time some 250 to 300 Natal Volunteer Rifles and a volunteer battery of six guns—obsolete weapons, of about half the range and one-tenth the effectiveness of the Transvaal artillery ; and these the Dublins joined on the night of the 30th.

In Ladysmith all was confusion. The banks closed their doors. The civilian inhabitants, who formerly scorned the idea of retreat to the south, now began to think of escape from the horrors of siege and bombardment. British and loyal Dutch farmers had fled before the advancing invaders from Charlestown and Newcastle, from Dundee and all the country districts in the northern angle of the colony. These, with their wives and little ones and such of their household goods as had been readiest of removal, had trekked into the garrison town, where they had thought themselves safe from every foe. The town was packed with the waggons of these poor, wretched, homeless people. And there were also innumerable refugees of all sorts who had fled from Johannesburg and the Rand before the wrath of the burghers.

It was now imperative that these should resume their flight ; and all Monday night and Tuesday and Wednesday morning streams of them departed south. Every carriage and truck that could be had on the railway was filled, chiefly with women and children. Waggons were limbered up again, and teams harnessed ; and one continuous stream poured along the road to Colenso. Some women remained in the town—mostly the wives and sisters and daughters of the townspeople. And most of the townsmen stayed also, and a few of the refugees, such as were of approved loyalty and likely to be of some use.

Up to this time there had been, amongst the multitudes who crowded the town, a number of spies—some of them voluntary and unpaid, others persons who had been sent to spy out the weaknesses of the position, the dispositions of our forces, and the movements to be made. Without doubt it was by some of these spies that Carleton's column had been betrayed into the hands of the enemy. Nor was there much question that these gentry had revealed to Joubert the plan of attack on him, which ended in the fight at Farquhar's Farm. For in a camp it is almost impossible to keep a secret ; and one traitor may wreck the best-planned move. To send, then, all strangers and suspected persons out of the lines was the first care of the military authorities. The next was to provide, as far as means permitted, for the comfortable transport of the women and children to a more secure abode.

The scene was a painful one. Women, faint and weary—men, gloomy and distraught—stood about the railway buildings. Well, might they be sad, as they thought of their homes ravaged, their crops destroyed, their flocks and herds, the fruit of years of patient toil, in the hands of the enemy. And children, tired and hungry, and fractious as weary children will be, tugged at their mothers' gowns and whimpered. Fathers and mothers despaired, for they knew not where next their

darlings would lay their heads. Long, long will it be ere the farmers of Northern Natal forget the horrors of the Boer invasion of 1899.

As early as October 28th the besiegers had cut off from the town its water supply; but fortunately there was a river running through the town, so that the defenders had no fear of being coerced into surrender by thirst. There was also a good supply of food; for during some months previously stores had been laid in with a view to the possible siege of the place. As for ammunition and other warlike stores, there was an enormous stock, especially of small-arm cartridges. In fact, whether for food or powder, the garrison confidently counted on being amply provisioned for three months.

The place was not yet actually in a state of siege, nor was communication with the outer world cut off. It was not, in fact, until Thursday, November 2nd, that the Boers cut the telegraph wires to the south; nor was it until the same day that the last train left.

Events had moved rapidly since that Monday morning when Hamilton's men and Grimwood's had moved forward to attack the centre and left of the invaders. Recognising that a siege was inevitable, General White made final preparations to defend himself. Besides clearing out of the town many superfluous mouths and useless hands, he disposed his troops to occupy the various positions assigned to them.

The naval contingent set themselves that night to make proper emplacements for their guns. It did the Tommies and the townsfolk good to see Jack at work. His endless cheerfulness, his strength, his tirelessness, the way he lifted impossible weights and dragged and carried impossible loads, earned for him unbounded admiration. Our soldiers are physically amongst the first in the world; but Tommy is a babe in arms compared to Jack. You see, the soldier has not been always a man of war. He may have been a tinker or a tailor until he enlisted at the age of eighteen or so. But Jack has always been a sailor—ever since he left school. He is a highly-trained man at his trade; for he never had any other from his boyhood, and the sea is a wonderful school. What with hauling at ropes, and handling heavy guns, and doing the hundred and one things that have to be done aboard ship, not to mention the fresh air and enormous quantities of food, the sailor puts on brawn and muscle until he can tackle any work that human strength may accomplish. He is a more seasoned man, too, than the soldier; and generally, of necessity, more resourceful. All this, be it said, without disparagement to the land forces.

The naval men worked all the night of October 30—31; and when the morning broke they were quite ready to converse—per the 4.7—with Long Tom or Little Willie, the two heavy Boer guns that threatened the town. Nor did the Dutchmen's gunners give them much peace that day. Long Tom had had a great fall the day before; but, unlike the hero in the rhyme of our childhood's days, he was not so hopelessly damaged that he could not be set up again. The Transvaalers on their part had been doing a night spell; and they managed to make another emplacement for their ponderous weapon.

All Tuesday was occupied by soldiers and civilians in preparing for a bombardment. The Imperial Light Horse, most of them miners from the Rand, sank shafts in

the earth, and made a perfect honeycomb of galleries into which they could retire underground to avoid the shells. The townsfolk also dug holes for themselves, and hired blacks and soldiers to make holes for their wives and families. For the only place absolutely safe from shell-fire is a hole underground. The Klip River has banks of stiff clay, and in this, those who were willing and able had dug holes or caves. Some managed to delve out apartments of quite respectable dimensions, sufficient to contain bed, table, cooking-stove, and other furniture. Others merely had small holes in which they could stand or lie. The soldiers, too, made for themselves such protection as they were able. They dug entrenchments, then constructed piles of stones that would be efficient against rifle-fire. They piled up sandbags. In fact, the 31st of October was one whole day of digging and carrying loads of earth and stones for everybody, that is, except for the naval gunners. These, having worked all night, and put their guns in position, were saluted at five o'clock in the morning by a shell. It was, however, badly aimed, and fell rather short. The next one was over the mark; and then Lambton's men sent a message to the hills. A balloon was floating above our camp; and so our gunners were able to know whether their aim was accurate or no.

It was. For an hour or two the Boer gunners replied at intervals; and the naval men responded, also at intervals; but at the end of that time the Dutchmen had become tired of it, left their entrenchments, and retreated into the hills where their laager was. Then the sailors, being informed of this from the balloon, stopped also; having no shells to waste.

And so the scared townsmen were left free and unmolested to burrow in the ground; and the old soldiers surveyed their sangars of stone that they had built. It should here be said that the infantry in Ladysmith had nearly all seen service, mostly in India; and, indeed, was about as well-seasoned a brigade as could at that time have been met with in the British army. And they knew, some of them, having been sniped by Afridis and Pathans, how effective is a little semicircular wall of stones, nicely loopholed; and how comfortably you can lie down behind it and allow the gentleman opposite to shoot at you, whilst you smoke or take a nap. And then, you not having replied for some time, he may think he has done for you, and grow careless, and look out from his cover. And if you happen to be looking out, that is the time for you to try your skill as a marksman. Wherefore Mr. Atkins made to himself little semicircular sangars on the hill-tops.

November the 1st was a day of truce. There were Boers as well as Britons lying on the hillsides at Farquhar's Farm, and General Joubert proposed an armistice to enable each side to bury its dead. This General White was glad to agree to. Have you any idea of what the burying of the slain in battle is like? Parties of their comrades, armed with pick and shovel, go out. Some search among the stones, and when a body is found bear it to the place of burial. Meanwhile others have been digging a trench, a long, deep, common grave. And a chaplain stands in his robes of office, and reads the Burial Service. And all men bare their heads. They have taken from each of the dead such things as he carried about his clothing, maybe a portrait of a woman or

Photo:] BOER PICKET NEAR LADYSMITH. *[Van Hoepen, Pretoria.*

a child, a letter, worn and creased, perhaps a scrap of writing bearing the message, "To be sent to —— at —— if I fall." Sometimes in the pocket of the khaki tunic is a Bible or a Prayer-book, "William ——, from his loving mother." A silver locket with hair and a portrait. These are relics to be carefully preserved, and sent by comrades to those by whom they will be counted sacred.

Here is a man, a rough Lancashire lad. Turn him over. Yes. He has got it, through the lungs. Search his pockets. Ah! What is this? The portrait of a woman, a wrinkled old woman, and on the back of it one word, "Mother." When that hapless lad was living no one ever thought he cared for anybody or anything except himself. But how we misjudged him. That old woman was as dear to him as ever mother was to son. And doubtless, if he had time to think between the bullet striking him and the flight of his spirit, it was of her he thought.

They are all here now. We commit these bodies. . . . They lie, these bodies, at the bottom of the trench, a row of men in brown raiment, with faces turned to the sky. The eyes of some of them are open. Most of them are bent or twisted. The death agony came upon them. They writhed into these postures, and thus they stiffened. No coffin, no tombstone. Only the brown mould covers them, and as their comrades, with half-averted heads, shovel the soil on the brown, blood-stained bodies, on the grey faces, they feel some sense of relief as the glazed eyes are shut out from view. For no glance seems to pierce so deep as the stare of a dead man's eye.

And that sound, higher up in the hills! Listen! Someone singing. Yes, the Dutchmen, too, are at the same ghastly work as we are. They are laying to rest the stubborn farmers who faced the 53rd Battery when it turned in its wrath and belched destruction. And they have now filled in the grave, and are singing, in their uncouth tongue, to some traditional melody, a funeral psalm.

That day, as I said, Ladysmith had peace.

In the afternoon there trundled into the town, under the white flag, a curious caravan-like vehicle, having painted on it the Red Cross of Geneva. It was a Boer ambulance. And it contained British wounded. General Joubert had sent them in, together with a note to Sir George White, asking that his own wounded might be returned by the same conveyance. Both humanity and policy suggested compliance with this request, and some half-score of Boer wounded prisoners, all who were fit to be moved, were sent back into their own lines. It was also amicably agreed that prisoners should be exchanged, but the only exchange made was of a captain of the Royal Irish Fusiliers for two Transvaalers.

The Boer ambulance party, all of whom wore the badge of the Red Cross, and were, presumably, not soldiers but medical and surgical assistants, moved freely about the town. They purchased whatever they desired in the shops, and, in fact, were in no way hindered in their movements. Imagine, then, the disgust and annoyance of the British when it was afterwards discovered that among the party had been the chief gunner of Long Tom. This treacherous scoundrel strolled about the town and took bearings, of which he did not fail to take advantage when the armistice was over.

At a quarter-past six (a.m.) on the 2nd

Long Tom opened fire again from Pepworth Hill. He was not quite in his old position, but he was near enough to it for our naval gunners to "spot" him. And so a heavy duel was soon in progress. The 40-pound shells of the big Creusot guns pitched in front of, and round, and sometimes into the naval battery. Jack whistled and laughed, and took it all cheerfully enough. He is used to narrow shaves, you see. But he did not take it lying down by any means. He laid his guns and fired them with beautiful precision, until it became apparent that the gunners on Pepworth Hill were finding their quarters more hot than comfortable.

"Good God, sir! Are you hurt?" "The Lieutenant's hit!" It was Lieutenant Egerton, of the *Powerful*. He was commanding at one of the 4.7 guns, when one of Long Tom's missiles dropped within a few yards of him. The flying fragments of the shell struck him on the legs, simply cutting them away from under him. He was an able officer and a popular, fond of manly sports, and especially of cricket, and the men picked him up and handed him over to the doctors. Every man of the Royal Medical Corps contingent of the Hospital that afternoon was at once accosted with: "'Ow is 'e, sir?" and when the news came out that the gallant officer was to have both legs amputated, one at the thigh, the other at the knee, there were plenty of those child-hearted, big-bearded sailormen who said: "Wish it 'ad a-bin me instead." And they meant it too. And then the surgeons came out and told how, when the operations were over, the only thing the mutilated man said was, "This will spoil my cricket, I'm afraid!" Not a word of complaint, not a murmur or a groan, only, "This will spoil my cricket."

They are like that, these sailors. When one of Nelson's men, carrying in the heat of battle some message to the quarter-deck, was struck down, maimed and mangled and bleeding, the only thing he said to the great admiral, who raised his head, was—after delivering his message—"and I beg pardon, sir, for a-makin' sich a mess o' the quarter-deck."

And Egerton, with what remained to him of strength, laughed, and chaffed the surgeons, and sent a message to his brave lads not to worry about him. He would soon be out again. And then he died, the first of Britain's sailors to fall in this war. He had had no small hand in getting the naval guns up to Ladysmith that eventful Monday morning, when they saved the situation. And he did not grudge his life; not he. For he gave it for his country. And no man can give a more precious gift.

There was other fighting in Ladysmith that day. The enemy was drawing closer and closer in, but the town was not yet completely invested. So Brigadier-General Brocklehurst, a cavalry leader, was sent out in the direction of the Free Staters' Camp (on the west). It was merely a dash, in the nature of a reconnaissance force, and only cavalry and artillery were sent. These were some Natal Volunteer Horse, the 5th Lancers, and the 69th Field Battery. The ground where the operations took place was neither so hilly nor so rocky as the rest of the country round Ladysmith, being more like the Surrey Downs—a succession of long rolling hills and valleys.

It was daybreak when the little column set out—the men determined, but wary. The Volunteers scouted ahead, and

presently returned with the news that at the foot of a hill hard by was a camp of the enemy. They added the comfortable tidings that there seemed no alarm, and that evidently they (the scouts) had not been perceived. The Natalians gripped their carbines. The Lancers settled themselves in the saddle. The gunners looked to their tackle.

Now! All together! Trot! Canter! Gallop! And at full speed the troopers dash ahead. Round this hill. What a bad look-out these fellows keep. Whip and spur! The drivers lash their teams The horsemen dig in their spurs.

Now! Royal Irish! Remember Nicholson's Nek! On them, Colonials! Remember your ruined farms and homesteads!

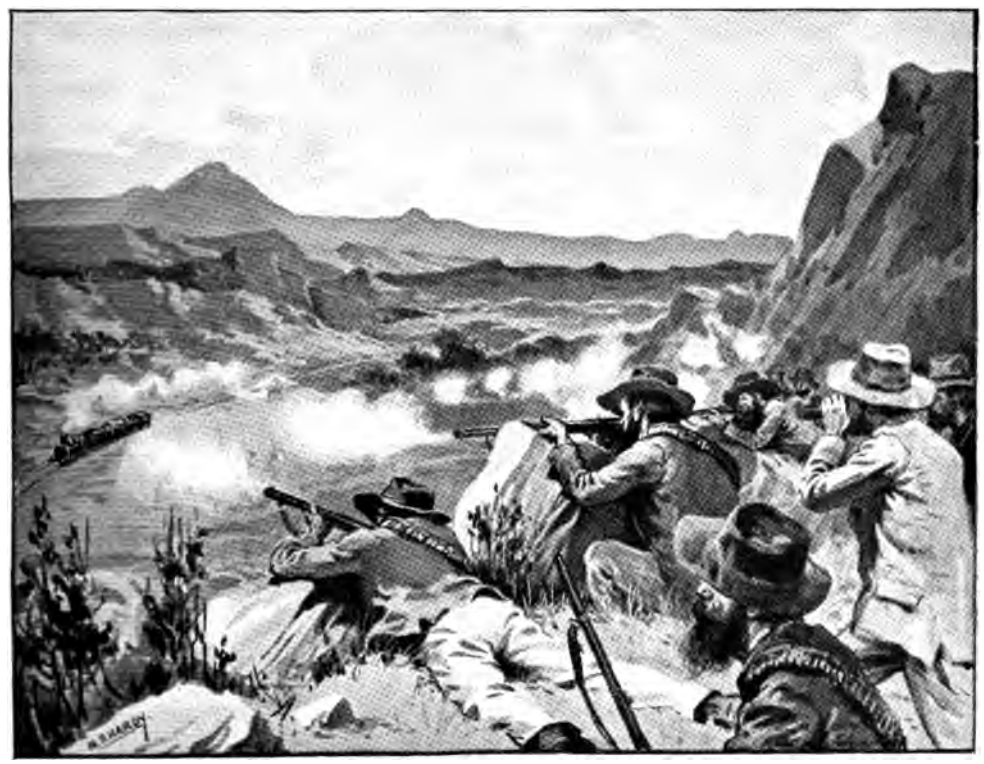
Ah! They see us now. And they do not seem to like the look of us. They do not procrastinate. Look at them scrambling out of the laager, over the waggons, anyhow. They are off to the hills. "Unlimber." In a moment horse and limber is away, and in another four shells drop into the laager. One for those fellows who are bolting *en masse*. Another and another. But the Boers are off. They have heard of those Lancers—the men who ride you down and poke triangular holes in you; and they have not liked the report. So they do not stay to receive cavalry.

The horsemen sweep on like an avalanche. Over the waggons, through the laager, and through everything. And hardly a Boer to be seen. The only things left are, item, an unfinished breakfast; item, sundry narrow-backed, thin ponies; item, certain fat sheep. The Colonials round up the ponies and the sheep like old and finished cattle stealers. Fresh mutton will be welcome enough in Ladysmith. And in time—though they do not suspect it then—pony flesh will be esteemed a delicacy. A few Boers, maimed and mangled by the shrapnel, are lying on the ground; others are being carried up the hill, and here and there a wet red trail shows that a man has run for it, streaming as he ran. Our mounted men are too quick for some of the enemy, and capture twenty or more.

There is nothing else to be done except to burn those things that cannot easily be taken away. More might have been attempted—the Free Staters might even have been dislodged from among their boulders—only that a message arrives from General White. He has heard cannon to the south of Brocklehurst, and has decided to recall him. So the elated but only half-satisfied troopers return to camp with their sheep, their ponies, and their prisoners, leaving behind them a column of smoke. The batteries remain as long as they can, throwing shells at the hill; then they gallop after their comrades. It has not been much of a fight, but it has been something to show them that we are not dead yet.

At the railway station and sidings all is hurry and bustle. General French is saying good-bye to all his friends. They are sorry to see him go, that dashing Irishman. For he is a man not only of courage but of counsel. He does not look like the popular conception of the *beau sabreur*. The *beau sabreur*, according to the *Family Herald* and other reliable authorities, is a tall, handsome fellow, slim as to waist, square as to shoulders, long as to limb, fair as to moustache. Colonel J. D. P. French is none of these. He is short, squat, grizzled. He does not even sit his horse "as though he and it were one," as the same

authorities put it, nor even "like a centaur." Nevertheless he is a wonderful cavalry leader—thinking rapidly, deciding quickly, moving like a hurricane. And although he is an Irishman, he is cautious and wily. And when an Irishman happens to be wily—well, look out!



THE LAST TRAIN FROM LADYSMITH.

Him has General Buller, newly arrived to take command in South Africa, summoned to his side; and there is nothing for it but to obey. He takes his seat in the train at noon, and sets off for the south. The first half hour of the journey is uneventful, but after that things liven up a little. Bullets begin to patter round and upon the train, and at last a shell crashes straight through one of the carriages. It is miraculous that the whole train is not wrecked. It would be if the Dutchmen's gunners could plump a shell into the engine. To "keep her going ahead" is the driver's only thought, and right manfully he sticks to his post. For any sake, engineer, do not funk it; you carry a burden precious to England in those shaky carriages of yours!

It is not a dignified thing to do, but better be undignified than foolish. French lies on the floor. He crawls under the seat, as do all in that train who are wise and can find room. And presently the puffing, grunting, hoarse-voiced locomotive pulls them out of range and out of danger. And it afterwards appears what a good

thing it was that French came by that train, for it was the last to get through. And the last man in the last carriage was a sergeant-major of Engineers, one Hocking, who had been invalided home.

As this narrative indicates, the Boers had now invested Ladysmith—not very closely as yet ; their trenches had not been run within range of the town except to the north. But they had, by three o'clock in the afternoon of Thursday, November 2nd, cut off Ladysmith from the outside world. At that hour they severed the telegraph wires. Thenceforth the siege of Ladysmith had begun—a siege destined for a long time to occupy the minds and disturb the hearts of Britons all the Empire over.

The town being now cut off, and the operations there being no longer a part of the main campaign in Natal—for a siege is always in the nature of an isolated incident of a war—let us turn our attention to the other movements of the invaders and defenders of that most loyal and gallant colony. It was here that the Boers showed to the greatest advantage during the war. Their quickness of movement, the rapidity with which they hurried from point to point not only large bodies of men but also guns of heavy calibre, extorted the admiration of every military critic. Luckily, by engaging them on the 30th and 31st of October, outside Ladysmith, White had gained a few days. Had he not done so, it was on the cards that Pietermaritzburg, the capital of the colony, might have suffered.

As it was, it was November 2nd before they were able to make a move south in anything like force, and they marched on Colenso on the evening of that day. Two thousand Transvaalers, joined later in the day by three thousand Free Staters, made up the invading force. Now Colenso and the Tugela River could have been held by three or four thousand determined men and a few heavy guns against the whole Boer army. But the men were not there. Worse—the guns were not there. There were a handful of Dublin Fusiliers, who had been sent back in haste from Ladysmith, as we have said, and there were some Durban Volunteers and Artillery Volunteers. But these had no weapons to cope with the enemy's modern artillery.

Thus it was that when the scouts brought back intelligence that so large a force was on its way to attack Colenso, it was decided to abandon that town and retire on Estcourt. All stores were removed. Unfortunately, the Dublins could not carry away the Tugela and the strong position on its banks. That fell into the hands of the enemy. It is certain that if those in authority had had the remotest idea of what would happen between Colenso and Ladysmith in December, 1899, and January, 1900, the troops would have been instructed to hold Colenso at all costs, to fortify the river-banks and hold the trenches so long as a man could hold a rifle. Every man in Pietermaritzburg and Durban who could hold a weapon would have been sent forward, and, perchance, the Tugela might have been held until reinforcements came up from the sea. For the Colenso position was the strongest in Natal ; indeed, it was almost impregnable ; and whoever held it held Northern Natal. To give it to the enemy was a fatal blunder, which cost Great Britain £50,000,000.

But we only discovered the importance of the position too late. True, the rank and file of the Dublins expressed themselves in no measured terms on the subject of the retirement. But this was not because they had any opinions on the strategy of it. It was because they, in their

Hibernian way, thought the whole business looked like running away ; and they held the Boers in the heartiest contempt, and were confident in their ability to beat the Dutchmen back. "Sure! if we have anny more av this shtrategic movemint to the rare, Oi shall think we mane to cut an' run!" was the general Dublinese opinion, as expressed by one in the ranks. Of course, there was none of this kind of talk in the hearing of officers—it would have been a breach of discipline. But, all the same, there was not the same enthusiasm or cheerfulness displayed as there would have been had the word been "Forward!" instead of "Retire!"

The evacuation of Colenso was not accomplished without some trouble. The town was fortified, and one of the strongholds guarding it was called Fort Molyneux, garrisoned by a detachment of Natal volunteers—the Durban Light Infantry. This fort was in a position quite isolated ; and the Boers, no mean strategists, saw in a moment that it was open to attack. So they attacked it in strength. The Durban men, commanded by Captain Molyneux, behaved gallantly enough Nevertheless, they would almost certainly have been wiped out, or cut off to a man, had not a company of the Dublins hurried out to their assistance. It really seemed about that time as if these Irishmen were to have no rest at all. A dreadful lot of scarecrows they looked, with their mud-stained, blood-stained, ragged khaki uniforms, their tattered boots, their varied headgear. There was not much above one complete kit amongst six of them ; and, as they had left behind in Dundee every scrap of clothing except what they stood in, not one of them had changed his shirt or his socks for nearly a fortnight. The result was that few of them had any socks left to change, and many of them feared to take off their boots at night lest they should be unable to get them on again in the morning.

Tattered and battered though they were, they saved the garrison of Fort Molyneux; and, indeed, it is more than likely that they saved the whole colony from being over-run. It was a lucky thing these men were well-seasoned. They had been out in the Colony for two years. They knew its terrible heat, and were inured to its blinding sandstorms. And this, doubtless, was why, hardships notwithstanding, there was very little sickness amongst the battalion. An old officer of the regiment once said :—"Give my boys a fight a day, and a meal every now and then, and they ask for nothing better!"

This was about the diet in these days in Natal.

They sped to Fort Molyneux in an armoured train, and soon their rifles made play upon the attacking force. The Boers had been pressing up to the fort, keeping up a terrific rifle fire ; but the plucky Irishmen dashed well within range, and gave them as good as they sent. The dust was blowing like a thick snowstorm, and that was the cause of one of the most distressing casualties of the day. Some dust got into the barrel of one of the Dublins' rifle, and the next shot the poor fellow fired, his rifle burst in his hands, and carried away the thumb and two fingers.

So hot was the fire kept up by the little band, however, that the Boer fire was kept down considerably. The leading of the Fusiliers was admirable, and much of the credit is due to a sergeant—one Sheridan —who directed the fire of his men in first-class style. The garrison at last were enabled to make a dash for safety. Leaving the fort, they took as much cover as they

could, and made for the main body. One private had an exciting time. He was detached from his comrades, and the Boers made a special mark of him, and managed to cut him off. But he was a plucky fellow, and determined to make an effort for liberty. So he bolted for the river, jumped in, and swam for it. The Dutchmen turned a hundred rifles on him, but he dived and dodged, and swam under water—luckily he was an expert swimmer—and finally, after a hundred hair's-breadth escapes, reached the right side of the river untouched.

This was the first time this part of the Colonial forces had been under fire; and, whatever their future lot might be, they would never be likely to have a narrower escape. Bullets had grazed them, burning their skins. There were holes through their helmets. And when the invaders had been driven out of Natal, many was the exciting story that could be told—as of one whose rifle was hit in four places at once; of another, with a bullet through his sleeve; of another who had been hit on the buckle of his belt.

But all's well that ends well. And the plucky little company came off unhurt, if not quite untouched.

The Boers shelled Colenso on Friday (November 3rd). In some way they had managed to bring down a heavy gun, a 40-pounder,* which they dragged up to the top of a hill at the north of the town, and from it they proceeded to drop shells into the place. It was quite impossible to hit back, so the little garrison, as we have said, set off down south to Estcourt. So strong was the position of Colenso that for two days the Boers refused to believe in its abandonment by our men. They thought that the British had retired in order to decoy them into an advance. This is probably what the Boers themselves would have done under the circumstances. But our men were not so deep. The Light Infantry and Natal Volunteers were, indeed, smitten with something very like a panic; and had it not been for the presence of the Dublins, there might have been a disaster.

It was, perhaps, just as well for the colony of Natal that the Boers did not make better use of their opportunities. Had they done so, there were only 500 regular troops and less than that number of Colonials between them and Pietermaritzburg. That old town, usually so sleepy, was now very much awake. Up to this time the Colonial authorities had not believed it possible for invaders to get past White; but the news of the reverse at Nicholson's Nek, of the shutting up of his forces in Ladysmith, and of the abandonment of Colenso, came as a rude shock to these dreamers. But, although they were rudely and suddenly awakened from their fancied security, they were not by any means frightened. The feeling in the town was that if the Boers came, they must be met manfully. A call was made for volunteers, and in twenty-four hours 2,000 men were enrolled. A small detachment was sent up from the ships of war at Durban, these bringing with them more naval guns on Scott's patent carriages. The Colonists could only hope and pray for the safe and speedy arrival of the ships that were now upon the sea. From overweening confidence they had passed into a state of extreme anxiety, and it became a grave

* A gun is known either by the weight of the projectile it discharges, or by its size. Thus, a "40-pounder" is one which discharges a shell weighing forty pounds. Others are spoken of according to size. Thus, a 4.7 inch gun is one measuring $4\frac{7}{10}$ inches across the opening of the muzzle.

question whether White would be able to hold out until reinforcements arrived.

As late as the 4th of November, in the evening, a patrol went out from Estcourt in an armoured train, and travelled to the other side of the Tugela. Even then the Boers had not plucked up courage to take possession of Colenso. The officer in command at Estcourt earnestly requested reinforcements, and an emergency corps of mounted volunteers mobilised with all speed and went to the front. On Sunday, the 5th of November, a company of the ever-ready Dublin Fusiliers tried to run into Ladysmith. They left very early in the morning in an armoured train, and managed to get past Colenso, but a little north of the Tugela found the rails pulled up. Obviously it was of no use to push on.

MR. WINSTON CHURCHILL.
(Photo: Heyman & Co., Cairo.)

Every day that passed was now a clear gain to the Natalians. The *Roslin Castle*, one of the first transports to leave Southampton, was due at the Cape on the 9th of November, and it was now morally certain that the first troops to arrive from England would be sent on to Durban.

Here let a word be said as to the plan of campaign.

At the outset, Sir Redvers Buller intended to leave the defence of Natal to Sir George White and the 15,000 men he had with him at Ladysmith—reinforced, of course, by any force that might be raised in the colony itself. The Commander-in-Chief intended to take the whole of the First Army Corps, now on its way, and march up into the Free State in overwhelming force. He would have had — after detaching men to hold his lines of communication—some 40,000 men, and with these he calculated on making an overwhelming attack upon the Free State from the south.

But the promptitude, the unexpected strength of armament, and the surprising mobility of the enemy, had given such a turn to affairs that the plan of campaign must now be altered. It became necessary, above all, to relieve Ladysmith, which for every reason it would have been unwise to desert altogether. Consequently Sir Redvers Buller determined to split up his forces—to send one division to deal with the Boers in the north-east of Cape

Colony, another to deal with those in the north-central district, and a third to relieve Kimberley ; but the remainder were to be sent to Natal to rescue White and bring the main Transvaal army to battle if possible, and (and here an important political consideration entered into the calculations) to restore security to Natal. It may be said that the original plan was a military one — the substituted plan a political one, largely forced on General Buller by those responsible for the government and security of the two colonies.

On the 9th of November the first transport arrived at Cape Town. She was the *Roslin Castle*, and she carried Major-General Hildyard and the staff of the Second Brigade, that splendid regiment, the 2nd West Yorkshires, medical officers, and various stores, and other paraphernalia of an army corps. She was at once ordered to Durban, and Hildyard was given the temporary command in Natal. In four days she was there, and the Durbaners saw that the Imperial Government had not forgotten them.

That very day a party of Boers of considerable strength crossed the Tugela, and advanced for about five miles to Chieveley, a place which soon became famous because of a clever young war correspondent and an armoured train.

It was on the 15th of November that it was decided to reconnoitre forward from Estcourt to the north ; and, for that purpose, an armoured train was made up, consisting of five carriages in addition to the locomotive. About 120 men formed the crew of the dry-land cruiser, these being Dublin Fusiliers and Durban (volunteer) Light Infantry. Captain Haldane, D.S.O. (of the Gordons, wounded at Elandslaagte) was in command, with Lieutenant Franckland, of the Fusiliers, as second ; and, by way of extra aid-to-the-wounded and adviser to the party, there went the picturesque writer of the *Morning Post*, Mr. Winston Spencer Churchill. Mr. Churchill was, during the war, one of the most prominent figures of that select press-gang known as war correspondents. He was full of energy and enthusiasm ; and, like his father, the lamented Lord Randolph, he had the knack of catching the public eye.

Part of the object of the cruise of this armoured train was to ascertain the state of the line itself. And a breakdown gang accompanied the soldiers, so that, if the damage was not too extensive, they might repair it. As a matter of fact, it was not really known whether the large party of Boers who had crossed the Tugela on the 13th were merely raiders, or whether they had come to stay. Neither was it known exactly how far south they had penetrated. Chieveley was the last place definitely known.

The working party had tools with them in an ordinary railway truck, another ordinary truck held four seamen and an ancient seven - pounder gun—muzzle-loading. There were two armoured cars, built on the usual lines, with sides of bullet-proof steel loopholed to permit the occupants to deliver a sort of broadside. The queer-loooking, boxed-up locomotive —also armoured—was between these two cars.

At 5.30 (a.m.) the train moved out of Estcourt. Frere was the first station up the line, and this was reached safely and in good time. Then the reconnoitrers moved forward cautiously towards Chieveley. They expected any moment to hear a crack from the hills, and the Mauser bullets splintering against the sides of the train. Nor would anyone have been surprised to find a

couple of rails removed. But no. All was quiet and peaceful as could be, and not a soul was to be seen between Frere and Chieveley. The train went slowly through Chieveley station. Still no interruption ; no Boers! Those 500 we heard of the other day must have been only raiders after all. How far back are they? Shall we be able to cross the Tugela and pick up some news of Ladysmith?

These questions are soon answered. A telegram was sent back to Estcourt reporting ; and the wire brought the message back : "Retire to Frere." So they put about. The line had been quiet enough on the journey out—the return was to be livelier.

It seems that the Boers had heard of the presence of the train, and had, characteristically, determined to cut it off. They sent across country—behind the hills that lined the railroad—three field guns and a shell-firing machine gun. The train lumbered round a curve, and then, for the first time, Boers were seen on the hill top. The infantry loaded rifles, and manned the loop-holes of the armoured cars. The sailors loaded their ancient gun, and trained it on the hill. "They'll never think," chuckled the seamen, "as how there's a gun aboard this craft!" But not for the first time, nor last in the campaign, our men, expecting to surprise, were themselves surprised. Suddenly, and simultaneously, a terrific roar broke the silence, and shells and bullets rattled on and around the train. Fortunately, except some rifle bullets, nothing reached the mark—and rifle bullets did not matter.

The engine driver, without waiting for orders, clapped on full steam, and tore down the line. The range at first was only 600 yards, and one shell at that distance would have smashed the engine to pieces. The train fairly flew, for she was on a steep down-gradient. But not far! The wily foe had calculated on this. They knew that the natural impulse of the driver would be to hurry out of range. They had therefore laboriously rolled a huge stone on to the rails ; and, as they had anticipated, the train smashed straight into it. As has been said, in an armoured train the engine is always in the middle. In this case the truck containing the tools of the breakdown gang was in the front, and next to it was an armoured car containing the Durban Light Infantry. The foremost truck struck the obstacle with such violence as to be thrown in the air and tumbled on the embankment. The armoured car was pitched right over, and the Durban Volunteers were spilt about all over the line.

The truck containing the four tars with their gun was not thrown off the line altogether. Much worse. It was jerked into a position right across the track. The Durbanites picked themselves up, and scrambled to the lee side of the overturned car just as the Boers galloped along from their old position to that side of the hill which overlooked the wreck. Thence their guns opened once more, and their rifles showered a pitiless hail on the volunteers.

The Dublins in the rear car, and the Durbans from behind the wrecked trucks, responded as best they could. They did not trouble to fire much at the enemy's riflemen, but kept up a hot volleying on their artillery. They knew well enough that a couple of well-directed shells would mean the capture of the whole party. Now began the most trying part of the business. That was, to clear the line so that the uninjured part of the train might get ahead. The great obstacle was the

half-over-turned truck across the rails. The only way to clear this was to get leverage on by pulling with the engine, and then by applying shoulder power to push the wreckage over the embankment.

Captain Haldane was wounded by this time, so Mr. Winston Churchill took command. He exhorted the engine driver to play the man; and that worthy, though he was only a civilian—and it was none of his business to fight—worked amid the bullets like a veteran. Splinters of lead cut his face and body. He wiped the blood off, and worked away. Who will volunteer to clear away the wreck? Nine men stepped out, and with courage truly magnificent, toiled away in the open at the heavy task of lifting the truck. Bullets spattered round them. The truck on which they worked was riddled. The missiles tore the men's clothes, pierced their helmets, grazed their skins, but only two went down. One devoted hero received two bullets through his lung, and blood poured out like water.

The enemy, seeing their prey making an effort to escape, began to creep down the hill with intent to close in. But the Dublins and Bethune's men thrice drove them back by the sustained vigour of their volley firing, so that the Dutchmen were glad to crawl back again up their hill to the safer distance of 1,500 yards. And, as they did so, the little band of Britishers gave them a cheer and a volley. After several failures, the half-derailed truck was pushed out of the way. A shell from one of the field guns on the hill set aflame the fire-box in front of the engine. At last the obstruction was removed, and the driver clapped on full speed. Mr. Churchill was on the engine at the time. They had not gone far, however, before they discovered that they had left the uninjured trucks behind them on the line. Back they crawled, but could not reach the cars. The engine had only just been able to crush through past the derailed truck before, and they dared not risk a second jam. So they tried to drag the Dublins' armoured truck up to the engine. No good. The place was now a hissing, spattering hell of lead. The one-pounder sent down showers of little shells, which burst as they hit the ground. The field-guns coughed out shrapnel and common shell. The rifles cracked viciously. They had got the range now, and nothing could live long under such a fire.

So it was resolved to put the wounded into the engine-tender, while the sound men ran along the line under the lee side of the locomotive, which was to proceed slowly, until they came to some houses about a mile up the line. But ere long the train increased its speed. The big guns followed it with their fire. The Boer riflemen galloped up within easy range, and re-opened with their deadly Mausers. Presently the driver increased speed, and fairly went ahead, leaving the infantry fully exposed to the murderous fire of the enemy.

Still they meant to reach the friendly houses, and there make a stand. So they ran on, taking what cover they could in the gutters alongside the line. Steady! was the word. And here and there a few Dubliners would make a halt, face about, and blaze away. They were pretty good shots, too, those Dubliners, and more than one Dutchman bit the dust as the Lee-Enfields cracked. But men on foot can ill compete for speed against men on horseback, and it soon became apparent that there must be a fight before the friendly houses were reached. Then a strange thing happened. A private

"THE DUBLINS . . . RESPONDED AS BEST THEY COULD" (p. 195).

soldier, but whether a regular or a volunteer no one has ever been able to find out, pulled out a white handkerchief and displayed it on the muzzle of his rifle. The Boers at once galloped forward to receive the surrender. The white flag had been displayed right in the teeth of orders for no surrender; but, once it had been displayed, there was nothing to be done but to give in. And so the little force laid down its arms, and all were captured. All, that is, except a few who had started to run along the line or across the fields as soon as the locomotive deserted them. These escaped.

But Winston Spencer Churchill was captured, and led with the rest to Pretoria. He might have escaped on the engine, but he declined to avail himself of its help. He was wounded, though he did not know it; and, not knowing it, he declared that only the wounded ought to be carried—sound men should go afoot. Wherefore he jumped off, and went back to join the party on foot. And that is how he came to be sent to Pretoria.

Of how he escaped out of Pretoria gaol; of how he wandered by night and hid by day; of how he boarded a train bound for Delagoa Bay, hiding at the bottom of a truck; of how certain Boers prodded that truck with rifles, but did not prod deep enough; of how the daring journalist reached Delagoa Bay, and finally returned to Natal to rejoice the hearts of his countrymen with despatches and letters, clear and enterprising—have not all these things been written of by Mr. Churchill himself? Not every young man under the age of thirty encounters so many varied experiences as he. But one thing is certain: the hearts of his countrymen went out to him when they heard how he risked his life fifty times a minute to save the armoured train.

Two others also distinguished themselves highly. One was Lieutenant Franckland, a young officer in the Dublin Fusiliers. This gallant officer exposed himself freely, and perpetually encouraged his men. He even managed to summon up a smile on occasion, and bore himself as coolly as any veteran of a dozen campaigns. The other was a colour-sergeant of the Durban Light Infantry, named Tod. This was the man who lifted Captain Wylie, when that officer was knocked down and wounded, carried him a short way, and built a little fortification or shelter of stones round the wounded officer to keep off the bullets. All this under fire. There was also a private of the Dublins, one Cavanagh, who, assuming command of a half section, directed them so ably that they drove the Boers back time and time again when the Dutchmen tried to close in. In short, Cavanagh was a brave man, even for an Irishman, and a fine soldier, even for a Dublin Fusilier.

To complete the story: the engine and tender, battered and burned, reached Estcourt in safety, and for a couple of days stragglers kept coming in in ones and twos. But after that there were not many reconnaissances by armoured trains. The longshore ironclad was found to be hardly so trusty as the sea-going variety. In fact, the only really successful armoured train affairs were the one at Kimberley, early in the siege, and that little affair early in October, when Baden-Powell reconnoitred down the line with a couple of trucks of dynamite.

The Boers now began to be in a bragging humour. They had boasted of being in Estcourt soon, and, on the

same day as the armoured train disaster, a strong party of them came down reconnoitring. Our scouts brought back the news, so General Hildyard sent out two companies of irregulars — one of Imperial Light Horse and one of Natal Carbineers—to see what was the matter. The Colonials skirmished effectively—the only way of dealing with the Transvaalers —killed two, and wounded a few others ; and then the Boers, finding they had met their match, withdrew to the north. One Imperial was wounded in the skirmish.

This was only a prelude to a much bigger movement, for on the 18th (November) Estcourt was startled by the news that from 1,500 to 2,000 of the enemy were spread over the whole country for several miles, and were marching on the camp from the north-west. Major-General Hildyard decided to go out and meet them. He went out a little way, and placed his Dublins in a good defensive position amongst the hills, very much the sort of position the Boers liked to fight from. The Boers came on very cautiously. None of your storming kopjes in broad daylight for them. They fired on our outposts and drove them in on the main body, and then rode warily up to within about 2,000 yards of where the Dublin Fusiliers were waiting for them. "Volleys at 2,000! Ready!" Click! click! as the men open the breech-pieces, load, and close again. "Present! Fire!" And with one single report, as though one gigantic rifle was being fired, the British poured in a volley. Then came a pause. Then another volley.

The Boers seem not to like this. They hover about in groups of from 40 to 150, apparently undecided as to their course. The British commander determines to expedite their decision, if possible. He has with him a naval gun, manned by certain of Her Majesty's sailors from the *Tartar*. And the bluejackets are waiting for orders to begin. "Load!" They load quite as fast as one can write the word. One man opens the breech, another puts in the shell, a third pushes the shell up into its position, a fourth does the like with the charge, the first man closes the breech. All this in a second or two. And it is done like that because every man knows what to do and does it the very quickest way. Loafing is not allowed in the Navy.

The naval gun is, of course, a good deal behind our infantry position—about 3,000 or 4,000 yards in fact. Presently there rolls into view of the staff, and of the naval officers, who are watching through field-glasses and telescopes, the Boer main body. They seem to be nearly 8,000 yards away. "Can you reach them?" The naval officer thinks he can, and says so. The seaman gunner is quite sure of it, and holds his tongue. "Take a very careful sight — there. What! You've trained it on a group of them at 7,800 yards, have you? Very well. Now for it." The seaman gunner pulls the trigger, and away goe the shell. It has to travel more than four miles and a half, and the staff and naval officers watch its flight with interest. "Well done, gunner!" It was beautifully aimed. The lyddite shell has dropped and exploded amongst a group of Boer horsemen, and horses are now galloping away riderless.

The Dublins seize the opportunity to fire another volley or two, and then the Boers have had enough of it. They do not like attacking strong positions, and they have a particular dislike to lyddite. That was the end of the attack—the attack Estcourt had been anxiously awaiting for

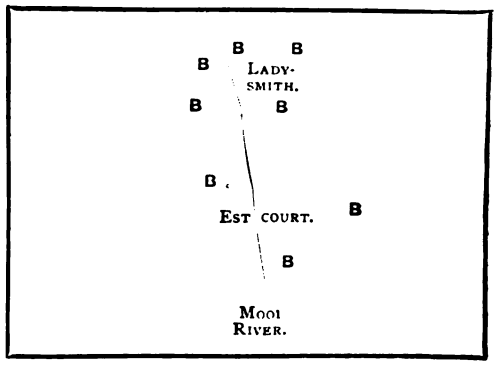
weeks. A dozen volleys and one shell had staved off the assault. The men stay in position some time longer, hardly believing that the enemy has retired. They think he has ridden off and will renew the attack from some other direction. But he does not, and Estcourt may rest in peace.

The next heard of the enemy is that parties of him have gone round Estcourt to the south. Stories come into Pietermaritzburg of farms looted, of herds of cattle driven off, of loyal farmers being captured and imprisoned. At Willow Grange, in the Highlands, on the Mooi River, the ubiquitous Transvaaler overran the country. The Mooi River is about as far south from Estcourt as Estcourt is south from the Tugela—something under twenty miles.

The invading forces now stood in a very curious position—a position that would have been impossible for any troops to occupy with safety unless they had the legs of their adversary and could march two miles to his one. The British were at Ladysmith and Estcourt. The Boers were north of Ladysmith, between Ladysmith and Estcourt, and south of Estcourt.

The various Boer commandoes are represented here by the letter B. So you see that from a military point of view the southernmost commando was in great danger. British reinforcements might daily be expected up the line, and the foremost Boer force seemed to run a great risk of being crushed between those reinforcements and Estcourt. But this danger was more apparent than real, as the sequel will show. The theory rests on the basis that troops move on foot, and slowly. The Boers moved on horseback, and rapidly, especially when they had to make a bolt for safety.

Leaving out the forces necessary to "contain" the British garrisons at Mafeking and Kimberley, and the troops required to menace Cape Colony (say, in all, 10,000), the Boers had at command at least 60,000 men at this time. Half these numbers would have sufficed to keep



White in Ladysmith, now he was shut up. What was the other half doing?

Bret Harte wrote of "The Luck of Roaring Camp." An instructive and thrilling volume might be written of the Luck of the British Empire. If the Boers had had the smallest idea of strategy, they could have conquered Natal the first week in November—or, if they had chosen, Cape Colony. There was nothing to stop them. But, instead, they frittered away their energies in mere raiding parties; in attacks on unimportant places; and by the third week in November this golden chance had gone.

Let us leave the forces here, and take a look round the other seats of operations in which events are moving quickly.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SIEGE OF LADYSMITH—THE BOMBARDMENT—THE FIRST ATTACK.

WE left Ladysmith at the beginning of the siege—a siege that was to become a word in the mouths of men ere long—upon which the thoughts of Britons were soon to become concentrated; a siege which was to be prolonged to a date far more distant than any Englishman believed in those days; which was to reflect undying glory to its defenders, and to alter the course of the whole campaign.

BRINGING UP THE GUNS.

Undeterred by the disaster of Nicholson's Nek, General White, as we have seen, continued to launch out at the foe; and, to the last moment prior to his complete investment, he continued to use his cavalry for the annoyance of the enemy. The last effort of this kind was made on the 3rd of November, when Brocklehurst, who succeeded French as commander of the cavalry brigade, was sent out on a kind of reconnaissance in force. Early in the morning he set out to the west of the town, having with him the 18th and 19th Hussars, two squadrons of Imperials, and a Field Battery—the 53rd—that notable battery which had been distinguishing itself ever since the war broke out.

The object of Sir George White was to give our enemies such a handful round Ladysmith that they would not be able

to march farther south on Colenso and Estcourt; and, although he did not succeed altogether, there is little doubt that his strategy was correct. And it had, moreover, the effect of delaying the enemy somewhat. About four miles out Brocklehurst found the foe—entrenched, as usual—on a ridge. He promptly offered battle. The Boers had only one gun in this position, and the 53rd Battery soon had it out of action. Our gunners got the range at the second shot, and then it was an easy matter to drop shrapnel on, over, and around the solitary piece. In half an hour or less it was out of action.

Brocklehurst had his field-glass to his eye, and espied a long column of mounted Free Staters moving off in the direction of Colenso—a fact he communicated to his artillery. Before you can say so, the six guns are slewed round, and shell after shell, well-aimed, well-timed, is thrown at the head of that column. The shrapnel bursts to a nicety; the Boers have no cover, and men and horses drop fast. For a few moments they press on, but the battery, working at a tremendous rate, strikes the head of the contingent at every shot. Wherefore the Free Staters right-about face, and gallop back for cover. Meanwhile our cavalry has been idle, for the word has been passed to dismount, and the troopers are now lining a ridge opposite to the enemy.

The Boer commandant, however, has not by any means exhausted his resources. There are on the left of the position taken up by Brocklehurst some other kopjes, forming a ridge, and on these there is artillery. Pretty soon it is in action, and it becomes plainly obvious that their fire must be replied to, for they are long-range guns, and unless they are subdued we shall have to retire. The 53rd Battery is urgently needed for the shelling of the Boers in front, so Brocklehurst sends off a message for reinforcements. General White despatches to his aid two more Field Batteries, another cavalry regiment (the 5th Dragoons), and three squadrons of mounted volunteers. But ere the reinforcements arrived the enemy had brought a 15-pounder into action from the front of a ridge on the left.

The enemy now threatened a heavy flank attack from this side. They were on three hills—characteristic South African eminences, not terminating in a peak, but in a plateau. In addition was the isolated knoll, upon which was the field gun already referred to. Our batteries quickly accounted for this piece, and the Boer gunners who were not killed ran away and left their gun behind. The time was now propitious for striking a heavy blow—for attacking the kopjes on the left, and driving out the enemy. Thus the flank would be secured, and the reconnaissance could proceed forward. The mounted infantry was selected for this task as being more suited to the work than cavalry; and away went two squadrons for the middle kopje. The Natalians attacked after the Boer's own fashion.

At a word from their leader they galloped across the intervening valley to the foot of their objective—every head bent over the horse's neck, for it was not good to sit upright and make a bigger target than you could help. So swift and so sudden was the movement that the Boers were flurried; and, by the time they had recovered from their surprise, and had altered the sights of their Mausers to meet the situation—a matter of seconds only—the volunteers had sped many yards on their way. But, for the last half of the distance, they had a very hot experience.

Bullets whistled past their ears and over their heads, and cut up the ground above their horses' feet. Here and there a man was hit—it might be merely a graze, like a red-hot needle touching his skin for a second; or it might be a fair hit in the arm or leg or chest. Every head was so well concealed by the simple plan of bending it down behind the horse's neck that no one was shot in the head at all.

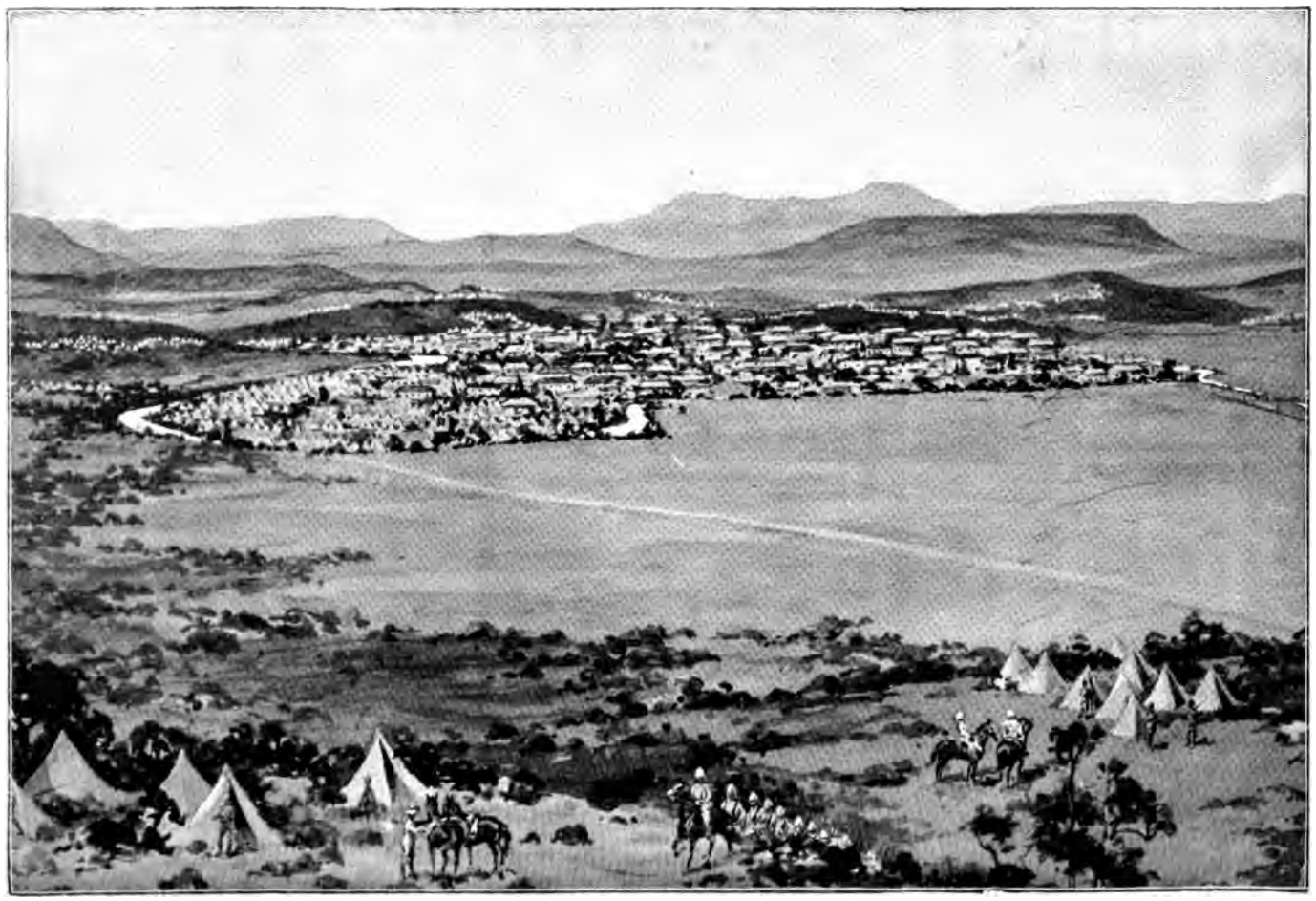
A few yards up the kopje they galloped, and then threw themselves out of the saddle. The first care was to safely bestow the horses, and this was done by leading them into deep clefts in the ground—there called kloofs—where they would be secure from anything except shell fire. This had to be done cautiously, for the rifles on the hills emptied their magazines time and time again. But these colonial brethren of ours—if they were not trained soldiers, if their drill would not have commended itself to the old-fashioned martinet of the Prussian school—knew one thing, and that was how to take cover. They were, in fact, irregulars fighting against irregulars, and they cared even less than they knew about the drill of the barrack-yard and parade ground.

It was wholly because of this very adaptability to the conditions of guerilla hill-fighting that they did what they did.

For they steadily, cleverly, stole up that hill-side. They crawled on hands and knees; they wriggled along like snakes, and only when it was quite safe to do so, only when perfectly sheltered, did they stand upright. Their firing, too, was excellent. A man would lie behind a stone for a quarter of an hour, and then, perhaps, only draw trigger once. He waited until he saw something to fire at, if it was only the flash of a rifle. It was a long business, but it was business-like, and it paid. For, in the end, after about two hours' hard fighting, they reached the top of the kopje. The Boers retreated before their calm, deliberate fire, and the Natalians had the satisfaction of taking the position. There was no grand bayonet rush, as there would have been had regular infantry stormed the hill; but the hill was stormed for all that, and at very little loss.

While this was being done, the Boer fire from the knoll and the westernmost of the three kopjes had died away. Our artillery, after silencing the gun on the knoll, did its best to strike at the enemy's infantry. And when the rifles from the kopje ceased to make themselves heard, our officers naturally concluded that the foe had abandoned his position. This was a propitious moment to make a dash for their laager, situate a mile up the valley between kopje and knoll. The Imperial Light Horse, bold fighters and riders as they are, should have the credit of this exploit, for it is always an exploit to capture your enemy's camp, bring away what you can, and destroy what you cannot bring away. And with considerable glee a squadron of the Imperials, who have hitherto been idle, shake themselves in their saddles, give their moustachios a defiant twist—as horsemen will, we suppose, until the end of time—and wait for the word of command.

Carefully down the ridge! It is level now! Trot! Canter! Gallop! And with head bent over saddlebow the men fly on their mosstrooping errand. In a trice they are across the space between our ridge and the opposite kopje, and then they sweep round into the mouth of the valley where the laager is. This takes them between the western kopje beforementioned and the ridge from which the knoll stands out. Trot! No need to



LADYSMITH. GENERAL VIEW OF THE CAMP.

blow the horses. Gad! boys. What a lark it will be! The second laager of theirs within a week. They won't stand much of this. Let's hope it is a good big laager—then we'll have a nice blaze. Happy thought! It's Guy Fawkes Day on Sunday. This is Friday, and we'll celebrate the festival in advance.

Gentlemen of the Imperials, did you ever hear an old wife's saw about a slip, a cup, and a lip? Heavens above us! The kopje is alive with rifles. The ridge on the other side of us is bursting with flames and lead! We are between two fires—neither of them more than 1,200 yards away. This was disastrous. The Boers had been "playing possum," pretending to be dead, so to speak. After a long experience in this campaign our soldiers learned that it did not follow because the Boer trenches were silent that they were silenced. It was a favourite device of theirs to lie quiet under artillery fire merely in order to lure our infantry to the attack. They would ensconce themselves in their trenches so cunningly that shrapnel could hardly touch them—firing for a time, then ceasing altogether. Our officers and men, thinking that the trenches must have been abandoned, would rush on, and many a brave soldier paid for the mistake with his life. This time the Imperials were surprised much in the same way.

What were they to do? If they turned to flee across the plain, they would be within range of the Mausers and without any cover for the whole distance. So they hurried forward at break-neck speed. Khaki tunics were dyed red. Horses were dripping blood and sweat. Until at last a point up the valley was reached where a friendly hillside and boulders offered cover. Brocklehurst had seen both the movement and the disaster, and he sent out the 5th Dragoons to hold the enemy in check what time the Imperials should be able to return. The 5th, skirmishing, kept up a hot fusillade on kopje and ridge, and diverted to themselves the attention of the Boer marksmen. Soon it was possible to live in that valley where the Imperial Light Horsemen were; and they hastened to cross it.

Across from our position, a dozen field-guns played upon the Boer kopje, and helter-skelter the Light Horse issued from cover and galloped to meet the cavalry. A hot fire from the Mausers greeted them the moment they appeared, but only few were hit—some twenty altogether—quite enough, if it please you; a cheap price to pay when they might easily have been massacred to a man. And now they join the Dragoons, and, spreading out widely, one troop at a time, regulars and irregulars gallop full speed across the line of fire.

A trooper's horse is hit. Down go man and beast. The squadron is at full gallop at the moment, and sweeps on. All but one; and that one is Lieutenant Pomeroy. He has seen the catastrophe, and promptly pulls up. At once a hail of bullets flies round him, but he heeds not. He must not, cannot, leave in the lurch another British soldier. "Up behind me!" he says; and the trooper vaults up behind. One touch of the spur, the charger strains forward under its double burden; and Lieutenant Pomeroy receives, as well he deserves, the congratulations of his friends for his daring act of bravery.

With the rescue of the Imperials from their unpleasant predicament the fight closes. The enemy have lost men, and had their gun silenced, but their laager is still intact. Something else will be required for the Guy Fawkes bonfire.

General White has intimated that from

his outposts he has seen another flank attack threatening Brocklehurst's flank. Therefore that gallant cavalryman retires, as perforce he must. Besides, it is now well on into the afternoon, and if he pressed an attack on the Boer camp he might find himself in a very awkward position just at sunset. Sullenly the force retires, and doggedly. Success has not been conspicuous; the advantage is to neither side, and the garrison has to lament the loss of many brave troopers who could ill be spared. One dragoon has been blown to pieces almost by a Boer shell — one of the few their field-gun managed to fire before it was silenced; but the Natal men have suffered severely, and the Imperials even more severely. And they return to camp not half so elated as when they paraded in the morning. The Boer losses were unknown—probably much the same as our own.

While this skirmish was in progress, something far more serious was occurring in Ladysmith. The Boers had pretty well surrounded the town with gun emplacements, had brought guns of great range and calibre from Pretoria, and the bombardment had begun in real earnest. Before you can appreciate the situation, let us stroll just to the north of the town, to Gordon Hill, and watch the naval gunners as they manipulate their wonderful machines, returning lyddite for melinite, and that with interest. If you turn round you will see the Klip River, a serpentine, wriggling kind of stream, which winds to the south and east, and is here very like the River Wear at the city of Durham. If you follow its windings you will see that it takes the shape of a rather square **U**; and right in the **U** lie the town, camp, and arsenal of Ladysmith—the bone for which all this contention arises. At the top right-hand side is the railway station, not far from the place where the line crosses the river (see p. 95).

From near the railway station a road branches off to the left (remember we are looking south). That is the road along which Yule's column marched a fortnight or so ago, but a little way out of the town it splits into two—one continuing to run east, to the Buffalo River and the Transvaal, the other branching off south through Nelthorpe and Pieters to Colenso. You can see near the splitting of the roads a hill. That is Helpmakaar Hill; and the men in shirtsleeves who are piling up sacks of earth there are some of ours—chiefly the Devons. They are fortifying the defences on that side of the town. Look! They have great need to, have they not? Do you see, right over the Helpmakaar Hill, another kop? That is Isimbulwhana, a very strong tower. From it they can see over and into our defences; and—take the glasses—you observe that two great guns are up there. These were made by Creusot, a French firm, whose "our Monsieur Leon" is either there, or on Pepworth Hill teaching the besiegers' gunners the tricks of the artillery business. Do you know, O most skilful Monsieur Leon, cunning Frenchman of Hebrew extraction, that your craftsmanship will soon be spoiled. Say. Have you any foreboding of that Kimberley bullet? Nearer to us, at the northern end of Isimbulwhana, is the Little Bulwhana, or Lombard's Kop — another stronghold of the enemy.

Look, now, straight in front of you to the south. There you see more men in shirtsleeves toiling on a hill. These be more of ours; and they are fortifying a hill which bears the classic name of Cæsar's Camp—and to the right of them observe more Tommies, also labouring. That is

Wagon Hill. Those two eminences will be known all over the Empire soon. They form our southern defence. And if you look beyond them to the right, you will observe two hills—the farther one is called End Hill ; and here the Boers have guns.

To the right, now, please, direct your gaze towards the Free State side and the roads running west of Ladysmith to Van Reenan's Pass. We hold Raye Hill and Rifleman's Post, but our real defence there is the river. The enemy have mounted guns to the north-west on a long ridge called Telegraph Ridge. You had better turn round to look at it. A splendid fortification, truly, and under it, nearer to us, is Thornhill Kopje, and further round, to the right of the ridge, between it and Pepworth, is Surprise Hill. Those sangars are Transvaalers' sangars—cover for their marksmen. Just to the east of it we can see the lofty height of Pepworth Hill, a height that seems to dominate the whole district. That is the habitat of "Long Tom"; and "Weary Willie," his short-winded friend, loiters there also. The bluejackets have christened him "Weary Willie," because most of his shells drop short.

Gordon Hill, upon which we stand, is our main defence to the north, together with Cove Redoubt. Now look a little to the north-east. Do you see it? That hill between us and Pepworth? That is our advance post, Observation Hill we call it. We have some marksmen more or less comfortably ensconced there to hold back any rushes from that quarter. Yes, my friend. It is, as you say, a lot of ground to cover. From our advanced north post, Observation Hill, to Isimbulwhana is eight miles. If you wait long enough, you will see something at which your grandfather, in his youth, would have died of fright. You will see that big Creusot from M'Bulwhana stirring up our trenches on Observation Hill —about 11,500 yards, or as far, more or less, as from St. Paul's Churchyard to the Crystal Palace. If anybody had told your grandfather that, he would have called him a perverter of truth unless, perchance, he had thought him mad. But just ask Jack, here. It's nothing, sir, he says. Nothing. We (and he slaps his hand on the 4.7) can pitch 'em a mile or two on top of that! My friend, don't you see what an important part the science of mathematics plays in the education of a man of war?

Now that the defences have been pointed out, you had better get down from your perch, and get behind some earth, for the play is about to recommence. At an early hour this (Friday) morning, the enemy began shelling the town. The buildings were not very substantial, anyhow; and as a matter of fact it would have mattered very little if they had been. Nothing but an earthwork is of use to withstand 94-pound Creusot shells. The naval gunners on Convent Hill and Cove Redoubt do their best. They lay themselves out for the heavy metal on Pepworth and M'Bulwhana —in almost opposite directions—and pump lyddite into them with great impartiality. Long Tom and his brethren get so much annoyed that every now and then they "go for" Jack hammer and tongs, which is exactly what the astute sailorman desires, for so long as the Creusots are trying to silence him they are leaving the town alone. Not that it is all pleasure for Jack, because, you see, he has spent so much of his time ashore in protecting other people while they have been building and digging sangars and trenches for their own protection, that he has had no time to look after any shelters for himself; which causes him to speak strongly when the shells drop close by; but he never dreams of grumbling.

All that day it rains shells. Heavens! How it rains. The 94-pound shells and the 40-pounders drop into the streets of Ladysmith, crash through the houses, burst in the air and on the ground as though a South African Vesuvius were overwhelming with fire a new Pompeii! Citizens run out into the street at first. Then they burrow in their cellars and the caves that they have made, for it seems that nothing can live above ground. One little house is shattered into fine fragments by a shell dropping through the roof and bursting in the wall. Fortunately it is untenanted. Some of its bricks are hurled a hundred yards or more, and through the windows on the opposite side of the street. The various camps of the regiments forming the garrison are terribly knocked about. It is almost inconceivable, but it is true, nevertheless, that not a dozen people are hurt by the cannonade. The shell-storm has one effect, however. It frightens the townspeople terribly, as well it may.

And, as soon as the bombardment ceases, a deputation of them goes to General White to see if some arrangement cannot be made to secure the safety of non-combatants. There are many women and children there, and, pitying them, the general says he will see what can be done.

So he sends an officer with a white flag up to Pepworth to the headquarters of Joubert. Will General Joubert permit Sir George White to send away the women and children to Pietermaritzburg? General Joubert will not. The town is now besieged, and to permit all non-combatants to leave would be like doubling the food supply of the garrison. The Transvaal leader knows that in a siege hunger is a potent alley of the besieger. A town quite as often falls through hunger as by assault. But General Joubert surely does not make war on civilians? By no means. He is willing that they shall be removed to a place of safety provided that it is not beyond the line of investment. There is the hospital camp to the south-east just by the railway and near to the junction of Intombi Spruit and the Klip River. The civilian population may pitch their tents there, and all sick and wounded must be sent to the same place. He—Piet Joubert—will see that no gun is trained upon this camp.

These are the best terms that can be obtained from the Transvaaler. They are accompanied by the intimation that all who do not seek the refuge suggested will be treated as combatants. In other words, no mercy is to be shown to anybody who remains in Ladysmith. General White, finding that he could do no better, resolved to accept what he could get, and communicated the terms to the townspeople. A meeting being called, the leading inhabitants swear by all their gods that they will never accept such a proposition. Next day four-fifths of them have moved down to Intombi. The rest do not flinch, and prominent among the stalwarts is the Venerable Archdeacon Joseph Barker.

To enable the terms to be carried out there is an armistice for the week-end. This is occupied by those who intend to use the neutral camp in a general exodus, resembling nothing more than the great trek. Intombi is about five miles away, on the left of Bester's Hill, and all Saturday, Sunday and Monday, men, women, and children, horses, mules, and waggons are hastening to and fro, bearing tents and household furniture, stoves, pots and pans —everything except provisions. The new camp, like the town itself, is well off for water; for, though the enemy have seized the town waterworks and cut off that

AMMUNITION RUNNING SHORT. "FIX BAYONETS!

supply, they have not dammed the river.

Tuesday morning saw the bombardment recommence. It was sufficiently annoying this time, but not highly dangerous. The Boers had a very leisurely way of conducting their offensive operations. Beginning after breakfast they would fire a few rounds from each battery, some into the town from their Long Toms; and others into our line of earthworks and sangars from their weapons of shorter range. Except on great occasions they invariably left off at noon for dinner, and it seemed that they took a nap in the afternoon, for they rarely fired until somewhere about tea-time. Then they would begin again, and contrive to expend one or two hundred rounds of ammunition before darkness set in. And, as a rule, the shells either missed their mark or failed to explode properly. It would have been quite amusing but for the dread that at some time or other an unlucky shell would strike and burst in a dangerous place.

The sailormen on Convent Hill and Cove Redoubt were the only gunners able to reply. This they did at intervals. They could not afford to waste ammunition, because their supply was limited and there was in Ladysmith no foundry like that in Kimberley where new shells could be cast. All that our men felt themselves justified in doing was in administering at odd times an extra hot dose of lyddite to any one of the Boer batteries which happened to be making itself a greater nuisance than usual. When the 4.7 started seriously to converse with a Boer battery, the German gunners usually had the worst of the argument. In fact, they almost always lapsed into silence after a few sonorous sentences from the naval guns. Whenever any of the besiegers' cannon really began to do damage, up went a balloon, the car of which contained two men, one with a telescope at his eye and the other bearing the speaking end of a telephone wire. There are some new guns on Lombard's Kop, and our fellows who hold Helpmakaar Hill complain that this battery has found the range and annoys them very much. They cannot sleep in the trenches, however hot the day may be—they have to be on the look-out and spend the best part of their time shell-dodging. Will Captain Lambton be so kind as to remove this irritation?

The telescopist up aloft tells the telephonist that he sees the guns on Lombard's Kop quite plainly. They are so many thousand yards away, just behind a lump three parts of the way up the hill. The telephonist calls down to the gunners. It is like a waiter whistling down the tube at an hotel—"Hot water for number 24." This is, "Lyddite for Lombard's Kop." The Boers do not approve of the aërial scouting. It seems unfair to them; and they blaze away angrily at the soaring ball. If they hit it, the aëronauts will come down, as the sailors say, with a run. But the telescopist does not take the glass from his eye.

"So many thousand!" "Ay, ay, sir!" "Load!" Before the word has floated out on the air, she is loaded; what time the seaman gunner moves the huge machine with a touch of his shoulder. The German gunners are peppering Helpmakaar at this very moment. Boom! There is something to liven them up a little. And there is something else. And another. And another. Man at bottom of telephone: "How's that, umpire?" Balloonist: "They seem to have cut! They have ceased firing." Good! Our day's work is done, in all probability. We have

upset their arrangements, blown up their gun emplacements, made them a little nervous too, for lyddite is a rare frightener. When it explodes, the noise is like the sky dropping on the earth, and it sets up yellowy gaseous fumes not pleasant to live in.

This is a typical day's bombardment. A man or a horse or a cow or a house may be hit. Once in a way the really dangerous shell comes. It bursts amidst a group of men. One receives a piece of iron in the face ; another is cut as with a butcher's knife in the abdomen. His entrails hang out. Carry him quickly, dhoolie-bearers, quickly to Dr. Jim. For that famous firebrand is in the town. But here and now no longer a firebrand. In the presence of sickness and disease a medical man has only one desire, one thought—to soothe and to heal. And Dr. Jim goes about the hospital and tends to the wounded now. So carry the poor wretch to him. The Doctor may be a poor strategist and a bad politician ; but without doubt he is one of the best surgeons in South Africa.

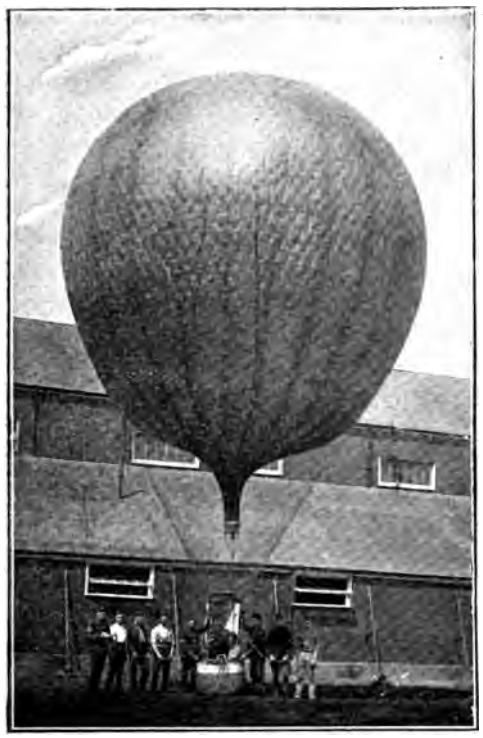
On the whole, however, casualties from the bombardment are few. It takes about 200 shells to hit a man—about 2,000 to kill one.

After a day or two of desultory cannonading, the besiegers made up their minds to attack. This was on the 9th of November, when there were very few troops other than the Ladysmith garrison in the colony of Natal, and when the fall of the town would have meant in all human probability the fall of the colony. It was, therefore, quite worth the while of the allied Republics to risk something to bring about the immediate reduction of Ladysmith. So they risked something. But not enough. For your Boer, while himself unrivalled in the art of defensive warfare, has not the gifts of dashing valour that go to the storming of entrenchments.

Bear in mind the position. An almost complete circle of very high hills. Inside this a circle of lower hills. And inside this a plain. The plain was Ladysmith. The smaller, lower circle, our defensive posts. The higher, outer circle, the Boer positions. It is usual to talk of a besieged town being shut in. Ladysmith was indeed shut in, and so completely that no one could see into it from outside.

The assault was to be made from Pepworth, the site of the chief Boer laager. There were, of course, to be attacks on other sides of the town, so as to prevent troops being sent from the British posts there to assist the garrison on the north, but it was upon the north that the main attack was to be made. As you see from the map (see p. 95) the first position to be attempted must be Observation Hill, where some men of the Rifle Brigade kept watch and ward. It must have been 4.30 in the morning when the cannonading began. Evidently the enemy intended to work according to rule and method, for he peppered Observation Hill for an hour or so from all the guns that he could get to bear on it. The battery on Surprise Hill shelled the trenches from the left front, while the Bulwhana guns, six miles away, flung occasionally into the rear of the position a hundredweight or so of metal at a time. From the direct front, the Pepworth batteries ladled it out with great solemnity.

The infantry advanced. Up to a certain distance there was much cover—the ground sloping, the hillsides covered with scrub and antheaps and boulders. In fact, just the country for your Boer rifleman, or for anyone else who knew the art of taking cover. But, luckily for our men, luckily



WAR BALLOON READY TO GO UP.

for the British flag and the British power in South Africa, there were, in front of all our positions, fair stretches of open, coverless country, and when the Boers arrived here, they stuck.

In the attack on Observation Hill there was such an open space. Up to the edge of it the Boers advanced in splendid style, gliding, crawling, rushing from antheap to antheap, from boulder to boulder, exposing themselves hardly at all to our rifle fire, and keeping up on the British position a ceaseless hail of Mauser bullets. You see they were now at the same disadvantage as we had been at Talana Hill and Elandslaagte. They could not see their enemy, and so were obliged to aim at his position.

But the Rifle Brigade smoked its pipe in considerable comfort, lying behind earth and stone works.

After a long spell of this long-distance fighting, the attackers tried to get to closer quarters. Here they failed signally. Immediately they showed in the open the Rifles opened fire in earnest. The range was not more than 800 yards, and the aim appeared to be good, for Boer after Boer dropped in the veldt and was carried to the rear. All that was needed was a rush, a dash, and the position would have been reached—whether captured or not is another question. For when the Rifle Brigade might be unable to fire, the resources of civilisation were not exhausted—the bayonet remained. But the Transvaalers would not face it. Time after time that morning a rush was started ; time after time the line wavered, broke, and fell back. There was no hero to spring to the front, drawing his comrades after him. Indeed the Boer tactics are wily, the Boer fighters are resolute, but their methods are not heroic. One's admiration may be awakened by the stubbornness of their defence, but one's heart is never stirred by the fire of their attack.

And so the Rifles, assisted by a few rounds of shrapnel from a field battery, continue to hold our northern bulwark.

Meyer has come down from Farquhar's on the north-east with his Transvaalers. If you want to try your luck, Commandant Lucas Meyer, sturdiest of Republicans, here you can find those who will give you a run for your money. Just as on the north, Observation Hill is being pounded from Pepworth and Bulwhana, so our eastern defences on the Helpmakaar Ridge are in process of being shelled from Lombard's Kop ; and pretty soon right from the front shrapnel comes flying. Meyer has brought field-guns with him, and is using them.

The Devons innocently wonder whether this is a prelude to a great assault, and their fingers lovingly linger at the left side where hangs the bayonet sheath. If the commandant does intend to rush us, he is a precious long time about it. He has halted his men within rifle-shot on the edge of the flat. There they are, lying on their faces behind stones and taking pot shots at our skyline.

"I don't call this no bally good!" a Devon grumbles. "It's like Aunt Sally with the cocoa-nut a mile off!"

Not quite, my friend. Try them at 1,200 yards. There is a hat—a grey hat—projecting over the top of a stone. Is there a head in it, he wonders? A cartridge slips in the breech. Steady, now! It is a good shot—if you make it. A crack, and the rifle comes down from the shoulder. By Jove! the hat has disappeared. "Good shot, Bill. You've either killed him or frightened him."

The Boers had been taught for many years to despise the shooting of the "Redbacks." They find the marksmanship of the lads in brown so different from anything they ever expected that many of them decline to believe these to be Englanders at all. They must be foreigners—else why do they not wear red? We could see red jackets two miles away, and we can hardly see this brown stuff at 1,200 yards. Besides, the shooting is straight. They must be foreign mercenaries. So the most ignorant farmers declare.

The individual long-range marksmanship of the Devonshire Battalion is quite good enough to alarm Lucas Meyer's commandoes, whether it hurts them or no. Once or twice small parties of them make half-hearted attempts to cross the zone where cover is not, and on these occasions the Devons treat them to some volley firing. They think it dangerous to advance, apparently, and so they retire again to 1,800 yards to cover and comparative safety.

The like happenings take place on the south, where the ridge called Cæsar's Camp guards Ladysmith from an attack on that side. Here the Manchesters have a chance to improve their shooting at the expense of a Free State commando. The attack here is even more listless than on the east, for the Free Staters never even make a pretence of rushing the position. They lie down a long way off and shoot away, wasting thousands of cartridges. And every now and then a Manchester man who has found a favourable position and a good target takes a pot-shot, and the Dutchmen find that, if we do not take cover quite so well as they, we can shoot as straight and as steadily as any hunter of them all.

The racket and din would awaken the dead, as for five mortal hours heavy guns boomed and bellowed, thousands of rifles cracked, and shells buzzed and bullets whistled. The result was as follows:—At an expenditure of about 1,000 tons of shell and about half a million Mauser bullets Joubert had killed three people—one of them a civilian—and had put out of action seventeen others.

Then the attack fizzled out like a damp squib. Joubert retired his men behind Pepworth, thereunto hastened by an occasional shrapnel shell. Lucas Meyer took his Vryheid farmers back to Farquhar's Farm, pursued by the derisive laughter of the Devonshire Regiment. And De Villiers and his Free Staters strolled back to their laager as leisurely as they had left it. As an attack, never was there a greater exhibition of incompetence. The Boer commandants were unable to get their men across the dangerous 400 yards of open ground. It is no idle boasting to say that

British officers would have led British soldiers across without difficulty. They might and probably would have lost pretty heavily, but in war, as in other spheres of life, you must be prepared to pay a price for success. If you are everlastingly counting the cost, nothing great will ever be accomplished.

But the truth of the matter is that the character of the Boer tactics is unfavourable to close fighting, and so the citizen levies were never trained, as all British soldiers have been trained for generations, to get at the enemy. The British soldier believes that once he can come to close quarters with his foe the battle is won, and consequently he is prepared to take risks to arrive at close quarters. The Boers relied on their good shooting, but superiority in marksmanship is lost at six feet. They were to learn, these Dutchmen, that a fortified town cannot be captured from a distance of three-quarters of a mile, and were to realise that to carry positions by assault they must be prepared to shed their blood like water. But on this 9th of November, 1899, they had not learnt, and so at about 11 a.m. they retired.

Now it fell that the first assault on Ladysmith coincided with the Prince of Wales's birthday ; and when the attack had died away, someone—I think it was Captain Lambton, R.N.—suggested to Sir George White that the usual royal salute of twenty-one guns ought to be fired at noon to celebrate the anniversary. The general agreed. Wherefore shortly before twelve o'clock the sailormen on Convent Hill and Cove Redoubt made ready. "We will send a birthday greeting to General Joubert," said Lambton. And he trained a gun dead on the Boer laager on the other side of Pepworth. "And let us send the Prince's compliments to 'Willie.'" And a 4.7 was laid dead on the big fellow on Isimbulwhana's rocky height.

On the stroke of noon the salute began, and with inconceivable rapidity the 4.7 and the naval 12-pounders discharged twenty-one shells into the Boer positions. The Dutchmen must, one imagines, have felt considerable astonishment at this sudden and furious cannonade. A lyddite shell upset the big fellow on Isimbulwhana; another burst in the middle of Joubert's camp—not a shell was wasted. And as the echoes rumbled and rolled amongst the everlasting hills, someone on Convent Hill, where the general and his staff had assembled in full dress, began "God Save our gracious ——" Cove Redoubt took it up and flung it across to the Rifles on Observation Hill. And the Irish Fusiliers on the west heard it and joined in the anthem. And the sturdy sons of Devon caught it up on Helpmakaar and sent it into Cæsar's Camp, where the Manchesters raised their voices with all the enthusiasm of loyal Lancashire. The anthem rolls round the hills. And Englishmen and Irish, Scotsmen and Colonials take off hat and helmet. The sun is murderous, but the National Anthem must be sung bareheaded. "God save the Queen!" Then as one man the soldiers spring up on the parapets, helmet in hand, waving, shouting, cheering. "Three cheers for the Queen!" Hip! hip! hip! hurrah! "Three cheers for the Prince of Wales!" Hip! hip! hip! hurrah!

Never was such a celebration within the memory of man. Ah! General Joubert, you may announce that all the country north of Tugela has ceased to be British. You may date your letters "Head Boer Laager, outside Ladysmith, Z.A.R."* But Ladysmith is still held by the soldiers of the Queen. Hip! hip! hip! hurrah!

* Dutch for "South African Republic."

CHAPTER XVIII.

SOME SKIRMISHES AND A NIGHT ATTACK.

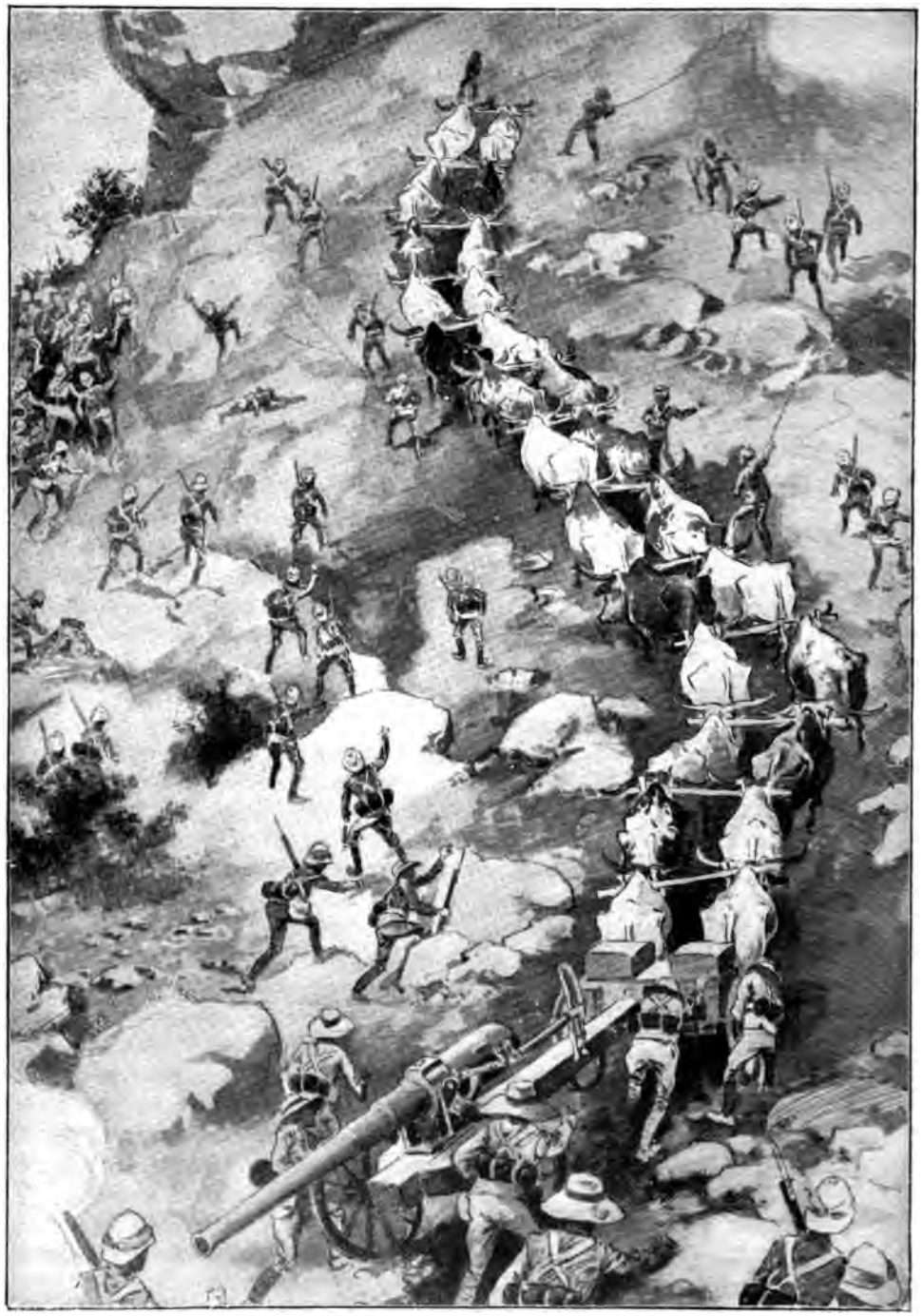
ON the 16th of November, and after that day, our forces in Natal increased considerably, both in men and guns. The 2nd Battalion of the West Yorkshires were the first to arrive, and a couple of days afterwards followed the 2nd West Surreys, who bear the proud title of "the Queen's," and the 2nd East Surreys. These, with the 7th Field Battery of the Royal Artillery and two naval guns, formed, with the somewhat shattered Dublins and the Border Regiment—hastily sent on from Malta—the whole of the regular forces at the front. There were also a strong party of Bethune's Horse, Durban Light Infantry, and Natal Volunteer Artillery—good men enough, but with weapons so antiquated as to be almost useless.

The grand total was a little over 5,000 men with six effective field-guns and two long-range weapons—one of the naval guns it was that had arrived just in time to frighten the Boers away on November 18th, as before related. It may seem a little strange that the field-gun, which is a 15-pounder, has only about half the range of one of the naval 12½-pounders. Generally, the heavier the projectile the gun is able to throw the longer the range. The reason is that you must build a heavy, strong big gun to carry a heavy missile; and the stronger your gun the bigger the charge of powder or cordite or other explosive you can use to throw that missile. But it happened that the naval 12- and 12½-pounders were guns of great strength. They were built, also, longer in the muzzle than the field-guns. Consequently, though only built to hurl shells of comparatively light weight, they hurled them 8,000 yards as against the 4,500 of the 15-pounder field-guns.

In point of fact, the sailors and their guns ought never to have been sent to the front at all. An efficient seaman takes years to train—an expert seaman-gunner years more. But it was a case of direst necessity. The plan of campaign was to pour infantry into South Africa. Infantry could and would conquer the Boers. You only wanted enough artillery to cover your riflemen and enough cavalry to scout. The mistake would have been laughable had it not been so terrible, had it not cost the lives of so many of our best and bravest.

Here, for instance, was Hildyard provided by the War Office with one battery of six guns having 4,500 yards range, while a few miles away from him was Joubert, with three or four 100-pounders, carrying 8,000 yards, a dozen one-pounder pom-poms, and twice as many field-guns. Moreover, here was Hildyard with 5,000 men on foot, and there was Joubert with thrice the number on horseback, who could travel there and back while ours were toiling on the road there.

We have said in a previous chapter that, after the Boers had tasted the naval gun at Estcourt and found it not a bit to their liking, they made a detour past that town



"THEN CAME A STIFF JOB FOR THE ARTILLERY."

and advanced towards the Mooi River, farther on the road to Pietermaritzburg. General Hildyard hastily threw back to Willow Grange and then to Mooi River Bridge three companies of the (Queen's) West Surreys. These were to hold the bridge as long as possible, and, if bound to retire, to retire slowly. In another day or two a few other troops were mustered, as Irregulars were levied, and soldiers came up from the sea. A camp was formed at Mooi River village, and at last the raiders were checked.

General Barton took command, and on the 21st he had with him about 2,800 infantry, one battery (the 14th Field Battery), and about 500 mounted infantry, raised by Major Thorneycroft in the colony and known as Thorneycroft's Horse. The infantry consisted of the 2nd Battalion of those Royal Irish Fusiliers whose 1st Battalion was divided between Ladysmith and Pretoria, the 2nd Devons—they also had their 1st Battalion in Ladysmith—two companies of the Scots Fusiliers, and the three of the Queen's aforesaid.

The Mooi River district is one of large grazing farms, and, doubtless, the Boers made their raid as much for the procuring of fresh meat as for any other reason. Certainly they took many hundreds of sheep and cattle and all that they could of portable loot. And it was here that the invaders committed their worst acts of wanton destruction. Contrary to the best usages of modern warfare, they not only took whatever they could use and made no payment for it, but they deliberately smashed furniture, defaced the dwellings of the inhabitants, and left every homestead they visited a wreck.

How different was the conduct of the British army when it in turn invaded the Free State, the Boers well know.

Skirmishes now occurred almost daily in all the country between Mooi River and Estcourt. Sometimes Thorneycroft's Horse would gallop out into the hills and hold a rifle match with the enemy at long range. Parties of scouts and patrols were perpetually coming into collision, with varying results—none of very much importance. At last, however, on the 22nd of November, General Hildyard ascertained that a force of the enemy, with artillery, had taken possession of a high eminence called Beacon Hill, and Harris's Hill a few miles beyond it, and was engaged in fortifying these positions. This would never do. Hildyard had not enough of troops to make a forward move, but he must prevent the Boers from entrenching themselves right in the heart of his country.

Accordingly a plan of attack was arranged. The West Yorkshire Regiment was to clear the enemy out of the hills at the point of the bayonet, and by way of support were to have the East and West Surreys on their flanks and the Border Regiment as supports. One battery of field artillery was also sent out, together with a naval gun drawn by oxen. Beacon Hill was about five miles from Estcourt, over hills and kopjes, broken, stony ground all the way, one perpetual climb, and the hill itself was of the not inconsiderable height of 1,500 feet, rising almost sheer out of the valley. The column set out about midday, marching steadily and well despite the difficult nature of the ground. Beacon Hill was reached at last ; and the Surreys opened with rifle fire and the guns with shells, while the West Yorkshires held steadily on. But obviously the Boers did not intend to hold this post. They retired down the opposite slope of the hill as the British infantry pushed up.

Then came a stiff job for the artillery.

The oxen were quite unable to drag the naval gun up that precipitous slope ; so the sailors were compelled to be their own battery-mules and drag gun and ammunition up by main force. No other men in the services would have tried to do it, but the sailorman is accustomed to trust to his own strength when a job has to be done. Oxen and horses are all very well for landsmen, but Jack believes in human muscle. So he put all the strength of his brawny back into it, and with a pull and a heave and a lift and a tug he persuaded his ponderous weapon up the mountain.

A climb of a mile and a half up an ankle-breaking brae, when you are carrying forty pounds' weight of leather and iron or hauling and heaving at a gun with a deadweight of four tons or so, is bad enough under any circumstances. But when it begins to rain as it rained that day, the task is an almost impossible one. It was a terribly toilsome climb. The ground speedily became muddy and slippery. The rain beat on the Tommies and the bluejackets, soaking them to the skin in two minutes. Speedily little streams of water came running down the hill, threatening to wash the men away. One sailor thought that if they only waited a bit they might "swim up the blessed 'ill." A Yorkshire man observed that he thought they knew what rain was in Swale Dale, but he wouldn't dare to tell them about this when he got home, or he would be called a liar for the rest of his life. Nothing, in fact, will describe that downpour except the fine old Biblical phrase—"the windows of heaven were opened."

Still on they went without a murmur. The sailors never dreamt of grumbling. Worse things happen at sea, they said. And they laughed as the water ran down their glistening beards, and cheerfully pulled and pushed their pet monster forward. And how could the soldiers grumble when these gallant fellows faced the steep so cheerfully? The honour of the Army forbade it. The Field Battery also had no easy task. They had the easiest slope of the hill to mount, and their weapons were half the weight and not nearly the length of the naval guns. But every man had to get off and push and help the wheels along. It was a stiff task, but at last it was accomplished, and the whole force stood on Beacon Hill.

For three hours or more the deluge descended, what time the men took a rest—lying on the ground in the mud and shivering as if ague-stricken. And, to add to their miseries, they could not keep their pipes alight. That is, the soldiers could not. The sailors managed it in their own fashion, for a sailorman would be cast overboard in mid-Atlantic and dive a hundred fathoms and come up with his pipe alight.

The West Yorkshires saw a good many things, did a good many things, suffered a good many things between Mooi River and Ladysmith ; but they never saw any sight like that rain ; they never did anything more plucky than that day's and night's work ; they never suffered anything more trying to their courage and their discipline than that awful climb and bivouac. As has been said before, soldiering is not all brass bands and bagpipes, nor even all goose-step and pipeclay. There is in it a great deal of undiluted misery. But the Surreys and the Border men and the West Yorkshires bore it as British soldiers can and will bear hardships—stoically, uncomplainingly, and because they know full well that war is not an affair of five-o'clock-tea and sugar-plums.

It was dark ere the rain ceased, so that there was no sun to warm the frozen

bodies of the soldiers. Instead, a piercing cold set in, and its effect upon men whose clothes were soaked and dripping may be easily imagined. But soon they were to hear news that would set the blood dancing through their veins.

"Men! We are going to attack the enemy's position. The West Yorkshires will lead and will deliver the attack. This is to be a surprise. You will march with bayonets fixed and magazines charged, but no man will load his rifle. Every cut-off* must be closed. Not a shot must be fired, for this job is one for the bayonet. If you are challenged by the sentries, do not reply. Silence must be observed in the ranks. No matches to be struck. And, above all, no firing!"

This was the very job our men were longing for. "Let's get at them," was ever their cry. And all the other battalions envied the West Yorkshires that night, for they would be first in with the steel. The stiff-built, bull-necked men of the Riding were particularly pleased with themselves, and their feelings found vent in a deep bass growl like the growl of a mastiff when he beholds another big dog.

Even South African showers come to an end at last; and when this one had exhausted itself the battalion set forth on their congenial errand. The marching was wonderful. In the pitch darkness they went on up hill and down dale, through brooks, over kopjes, a beeline for the Boer position. A few times it lightened—the long rolling sheets of lightning lasting a minute or more, quite unlike the English flash variety. And when the heavens vouchsafed the illumination, the battalions seized the opportunity to correct any little error of direction.

On, on they marched until the wee small hours ayont the twal', amid lightning and darkness. One more climb—only one. It is the steepest of any; but there is something at the top. Light was the toil and easy the way; for at the top the Boers slept; and the fingers of the leading battalion tingled. Nearly at the top now. They have not heard us! What bad watch they keep, these citizen soldiers!

Crack! That was a Lee-Metford. No Mauser ever made a sound like that. It is one of our own men who has fired a shot. A figure starts up almost from under our feet. 'Tis the Boer sentinel, who has been sleeping. "Piet! Hans! Jan!" he yells, and fires his rifle. Never a word more is spoken as a short, thick-set Yorkshireman springs forward. One terrible thrust. The steel is jerked out. Blood spurts after it. And there is one Boer the less in Kruger's army.

But the laager is now alarmed. A flash of lightning reveals the position; and it is alive with men. No need now to keep silence. From a thousand throats bursts out a cheer—a cheer of triumph, a cheer of hopes realised. Now we have them. Let them stand up to us at two paces if they can. Hurrah! Five hundred Yorkshire bloodhounds leap into the trenches, fiercely terrible. They are irresistible at that moment. Evidently the Boers think so, too, for they make no defence. They run in all directions. The bloodhounds pursue, baying fiercely. The Boers throw away rifles, blankets, ammunition—anything and everything that might impede them in running; and, fear lending them wings, they most of them manage to get away. Not all. Not all. Some forty bear

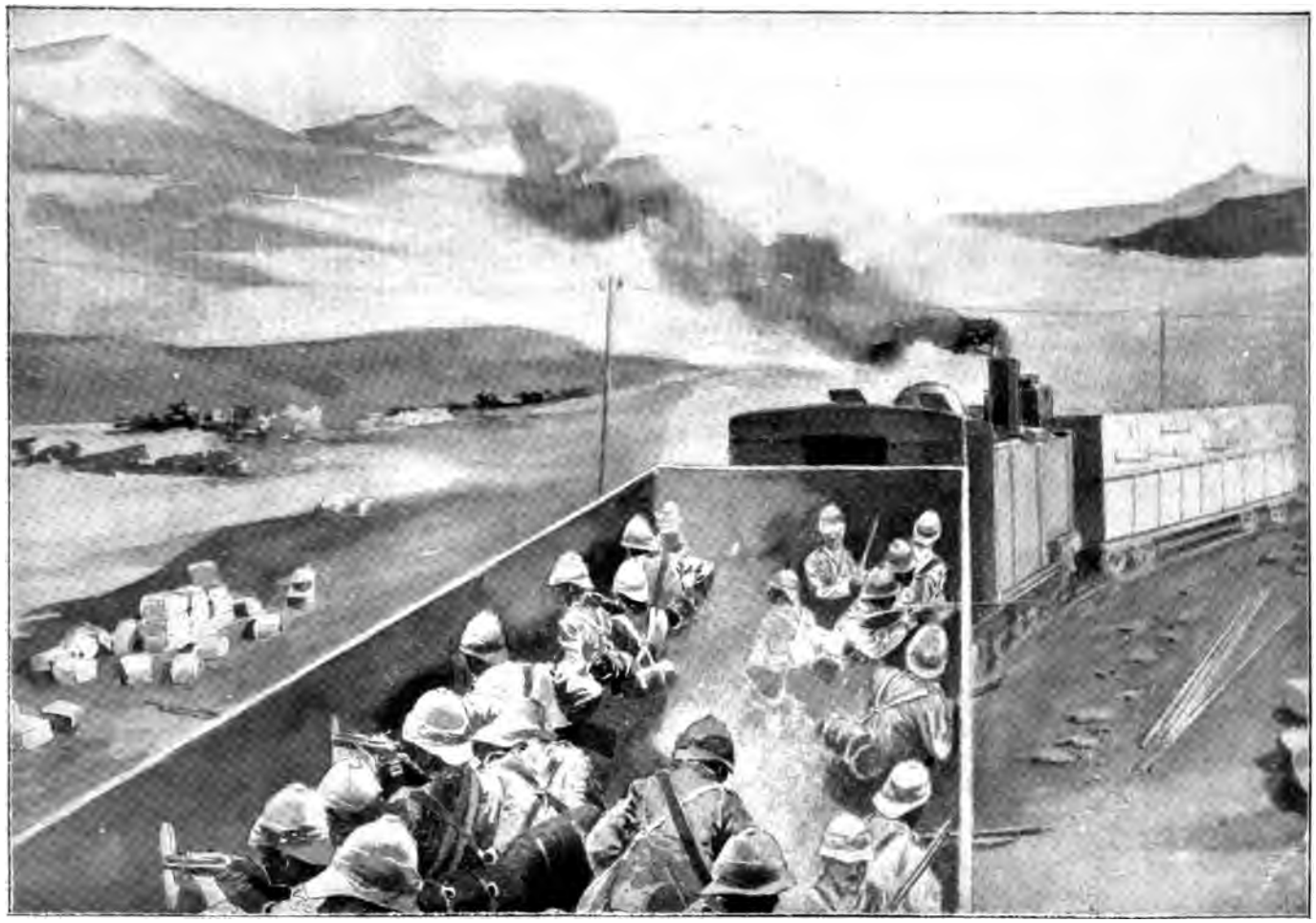
* The effect is that although the soldier has ten cartridges in the magazine of his rifle, these are divided from the acting part of the gun by a thin sheet of metal. Before he can fire he must pull out this piece of metal, which is called the "cut-off."

the marks of the Tykes, who, when they find a man ready to stand and "have it out," finish the business with neatness and despatch. It is generally one tremendous thrust straight through the chest from front to back. This saves time; for nobody can stand up for a second round. There is one little private, about 5 feet 6 inches in height, but with the chest and shoulders of a giant. As he jumped into the trench a Mauser went off and a bullet drove through his knee, sideways. This maddens him. He will, as he well knows, soon have a stiff leg, and be invalided home. He is going to "bag" one before he stiffens, anyhow. So, when a lightning flash reveals to him a gigantic Boer running across the plateau, the little man sets off after him. The Boer loses ground. "Stop! Stop! you ——, stop!" But the Dutchman perseveres. Blood is now pouring out of the perforated knee. One terrific spurt—a jump—the bayonet, with all the weight of the man and all the force of the jump behind it, goes in at the shoulder-blade. It comes out at the breast. The slayer and the slain roll over together; and then the Yorkshireman picks up his rifle, draws the bayonet from the body of his foe, and limps back. "Ah tell yer wot, lads. Them theer Booers maayn't be mooch i' t' fightin' loine—at least, ah doan't reckon nowt on 'em—but they're champion sprinters." And then he lies down behind a stone; for the Boers have now recovered from their fright and are dropping lead into their former position.

Our men, too, fire away occasionally; but the only effect seems to be to hurt one another. Some of the Yorkshires, finding the Boers on the run, had followed, breaking line, and as these came back they are mistaken for Boers, and more than one is fired at. To suffer at the hands of your friends is a horrible experience; and so the battalion was to find out a few months afterwards, when, on a great occasion of which more anon, they were shelled by British guns.

When daylight came, an extraordinary sight presented itself to the men who had taken the position. The ground was like a bleaching-ground, upon which had been emptied the contents of an armoury and of a few saddlers' shops. The Boers had obviously been sleeping, each man wrapped in a thick blanket, and many with their saddles for pillows. Also, it seemed that every man slumbered with his gun ready to hand. On hearing the fierce cheer of the British infantry, every man had thrown his blanket away, abandoned his saddle, and, in many cases, his rifle also. Hence the curious bleaching-ground look of the plateau.

One thing caused great disappointment to our men, and even greater to the general who planned the effective surprise; and that was the failure to capture any Boer artillery. Early in the evening the Dutchmen certainly had heavy guns in this position; and had even exchanged compliments during the rainstorm with our naval guns. Most fortunately for them, however, their commandant had withdrawn the guns late at night to another hill two or three miles away. This was part of the Boer system of tactics. They moved their guns about in most remarkable fashion, continually changing positions, and thus putting our gunners every day to the trouble of locating them afresh. It was a troublesome business to move heavy pieces about in this style, especially over hilly country, and must have involved enormous labour of the most fatiguing description; but it undoubtedly paid. In fact, all through



THE INTERIOR OF AN ARMOURED TRAIN.

the war the Dutchmen's wiliness gave our generals and our men as much trouble as their stubbornness—and that is saying much. The Boer might be—well, many things undesirable; but his worst enemy could not call him a fool.

So that the West Yorkshires found themselves in the morning with a handful of prisoners, any number of blankets and saddles, a few ponies, many cartridge belts, and a few score Mauser rifles, but with no guns. Likewise, they had little food.

As soon as dawn broke, the enemy's artillery let the British know where it was and what it was capable of. Shells began to drop amongst the victorious battalion, and it soon became obvious that the Boers intended to make a fight for it. Soon it was found that our naval guns—also, of course, our field artillery—were outranged; and, General Hildyard having in the main attained his object, he ordered the force to all back on Estcourt. The East Surreys, were advanced to cover the retirement of the Yorkshires, who now began to suffer. For, as soon as they began to retire, the enemy pressed on within rifle range and dropped man after man—nor did the East Surreys escape.

So close on our men's heels did the Boers press that if a man stopped behind for a few minutes to look after a wounded comrade, he ran a very good chance of being captured. Major Hobbs, of the West Yorkshires, was taken prisoner in this way. Eight of that regiment were left on the ground, two more were brought in mortally wounded, while forty-eight more were hit, most of them slightly; and, in addition to the Major, seven were taken prisoners. The East Surreys lost two killed, the Imperial Light Horse one, and each of these regiments had a few wounded.

It is no light task to retire for five miles under a heavy musketry and artillery fire. The night attack at Estcourt was effective. It stopped the Boer advance into Natal; and, in the opinion of good judges, saved the colony from wrack, if not from conquest.

The British now made a move forward. First Barton moved up to Weston, nearer Estcourt. Then Hildyard moved ahead to Frere, and Barton pushed on with his force to Estcourt. And the Boers retired from the Mooi River, taking a roundabout route *via* Weenen to Colenso. This they accomplished in good order. The only incident worthy of note being a little cattle-lifting by some of the mounted volunteers, who captured nearly 1,000 head of Boer sheep and cattle.

So that, on the 27th of November, the position in Natal stood thus:—The British base was at Estcourt; the front was at Frere, twelve miles to the north. Between Frere and Colenso the country was in possession of the enemy in some force. At Colenso they had their advanced camp, resting on the Tugela. Between Colenso and Ladysmith they were engaged busily in fortifying the ground.

Meanwhile Sir Redvers had determined to reorganise his plan of campaign, to take over in person the Natal command, and to split the Army Corps into fragments—the largest to operate in Natal, the others, under Gatacre, French, and Methuen, to hold the Dutch in check in Cape Colony and to relieve Kimberley. Lord Dundonald went to Natal to take command of the irregulars, and he took with him some Colt guns—machine guns something like Maxims—mounted on carriages of his own invention. His lordship had had some difficulty in obtaining a command. The day was not far distant when General Buller and the British people would thank God for Lord Dundonald's presence.

CHAPTER XIX.

WITH METHUEN—THE FIRST STEPS TOWARDS KIMBERLEY.

ON the abandonment of the original plan of advancing through the north of Cape Colony with a whole Army Corps, Sir Redvers Buller decided to relieve Kimberley. And the way he proposed to do it was by sending a strong column, chiefly of infantry, up the railway to Orange River, and thence along the railway to the beleaguered town. On November 12th Lord Methuen, the general commanding the division, arrived with his staff at Orange River camp; and in a few days afterwards troops began to pour in from the south. The division concentrated at De Aar Junction, where a branch runs off to Naauwpoort. De Aar is 501 miles by rail from Cape Town, about 80 from Orange River, and nearly 70 more from Kimberley.

GENERAL LORD METHUEN, C.B.
(Photo: Gregory & Co., Strand.)

The journey to De Aar was uneventful. Immediately on the arrival of a transport containing troops at Cape Town they were taken to the railway and put on board trains. Arrived at De Aar, they were either sent straight on to Orange River station, or else remained to help with the transport. De Aar was a wonderful sight in those days. Hundreds of mules and oxen were there. Countless waggons, packages and cases of food and ammunition, ambulances, hospitals, medical stores. To drive the teams and load and unload the waggons, the Government had engaged many hundreds of men, Kaffirs, Hottentots, half-breeds, and Cape Dutch. The native "boy" was in his element. He strutted about in a uniform, he had more than enough to eat and drink, his pay was enormous for him. It was no less than £3 a month. Never had there been such a time for the Kaffirs. Besides these, there were hundreds of Army Service men, who were given all the most difficult jobs to do,

and, what is more, had to keep a very sharp eye on their dusky allies.

From the 12th of November onwards men and supplies began to be poured forward to Orange River. It was slow work enough by train, for the eighty or so miles took four hours to accomplish. It was slower still by road, as those companies discovered who were told off to accompany the transport waggons across the veldt. Imagine a march of eighty miles across an almost treeless stretch of country in 100 degrees of heat. A slow march at the rate of about three miles in two hours. And as if the heat were not enough, here and there a dust devil. A dust devil is a huge column of dust hundreds of feet high, almost as thick as a waterspout. It comes at you, filling your nose and eyes and ears, getting down your neck, and altogether making you feel as if you were being stifled. And even when there was no dust devil there was nearly always a cloud of the grittiest, sandiest dust, stinging your hands and face, and making you bless the beautiful South African climate. Still, the work had to be done, and done it was.

Day after day trains of waggons toiled across that fearsome country. Bullock waggons, mule waggons, Cape waggons, English waggons, waggons of every conceivable size and construction. It was slow enough, in all conscience. For a transport convoy must regulate its pace by the speed of the slowest bullock and the tractability of the most obstreperous mule. And there were some mules, too! Agents of the British Government had scoured the wide world for them. Italy, Spain, South America, the western States, each had contributed its quota. Never was there such a time in the mule business. Beasts that could have been bought in September for £12 rose in November to £40. Suppose the mule-dealer to be first cousin to the horse-dealer, and no more need be said. To this day, if you really wish to hear some expressive language of the kind sometimes called "plain Saxon," but which is, in fact, largely imported from Flanders, engage in conversation with an Army Service Corps man who was at De Aar in November of 1899. If you lead the talk up to the subject of Italian mules, in particular, you will find him remarkably fluent.

And, indeed, it was almost equally cruel to man and beast to take those long-eared animals from blue-skyed Italy to scorching South Africa. The Cape Boys and Hottentots and Kaffirs could not manage them at all, and our own men were little better. A convoy wends it weary way over the veldt. Suddenly the whole lot stops dead. The leading mule of the foremost waggon has taken it into his head to be displeased. No amount of whip has the least effect. "Ere, Boneyparty"—this to a gorgeous Kaffir driver—"gimme the whip." Crack! crack! A hoof shoots out with terrific force. The mule behind, finding himself ill-treated for no just cause, begins to lash out also. And in sixty seconds the whole team is one kicking, plunging mass, mixed with whip lashes.

"Come 'ere, Tom. See if you can talk Hitalian to this long-nosed, adjectival son of Tophet!" It is of no avail. The only wise course is to let them all kick and bite until they are tired, and then unmix their harness and start on again.

"Wot's that?" "Another blessid cow down!" And the patient animal is lifted up by main force and goaded into progress.

"Did yer ever see sich a Gawd-forsaken country as this?"

"Shoot thi big mahth! Tha's everlastin' groomblin', tha is! Ah wish ah'd

'ad thi i' t' Soudan—theer it *was* ——!" "Oh! Brrr! Grrr——" The poor fellow covers his face with his hands and almost tears his eyes out with vicious rubbing. For even as he spoke a dust devil suddenly arose and struck him. His mouth is filled. He spits some out, but swallows more. His eyes are blinded. Poor wretch! In a day or two he will be in hospital, with that terrible ocular disease brought on by the glaring sun and the deadly dust.

The lumbering convoy winds along. Here is a drift to be forded. Carefully, now! The bullocks wade slowly into the water. There is a kind of road made through the river, just wide enough for one team and one waggon at a time. This road has been heightened above the rest of the river-bed; and if a silly bullock or a stupid mule deviates from the strait path, the waggon will assuredly be upset, and the drivers of that team will hear about it. So the train winds through the water cautiously, though noisily. For the Cape Boy and the Kaffir and the Hottentot make frantic demonstrations and swear at their dumb charges in broken English and broken Dutch and elegant dialects of the Kaffir speech. And the Army Service Corps men not seldom lose their tempers and objurgate the blacks and half-breeds in their native Saxon, tinged with every dialect. Here a man expresses himself in the rising accents of Aberdeen awa'. There you hear the broad speech and deep bass chest notes that proclaim the son of the Ridings. This is the fluent tongue of a boy from Cork. That the musical drawl of a Devonian. But, despite the language, they do the work.

Photo: B. Grant,] JAMESTOWN, ST. HELENA. [*St. Helena.*

WHERE THE BOER PRISONERS WERE SENT.

"If I'd only a-known wot this bloomin' work was like, I'd a' joined the 'tillery!" And it is heart-breaking. The next drift happens to be too deep to cross. There has been some rain somewhere up-country, and the water is deep. So the men lie down for an hour or two, by turns. Some—in fact, most of them—take advantage of the impediment to progress to have a bathe. They may have to wait for an hour or two only. They may be detained for half a day. A short rest they do not mind, but a long delay they hate. For, apart from the fact that they ought to be prompt for the army's sake, they know that they must render an account of themselves to an officer who will not overlook any breach of duty.

As a matter of fact, the very hardest work of all falls to the Army Service Corps. It is not, of course, the most dangerous. But it is constant; harassingly incessant. For when these men reach Orange River camp, they know full well that their work is by no means at an end. The waggons must be unloaded. An oven will have to be built to bake bread for the Division. "I tell yer wot. We're the bloomin' slaveys of the 'ole bloomin' army. That's wot we are. And don't you forgit it!"

But, despite weariness, they do the work.

There is no glory, no show, no V.C. at the end of it. The man of the Army Service Corps does not find his portrait in the illustrated papers. Nor, when he reaches his native shore, will his fellow-townsmen make a feast and deliver speeches in his honour, as they will in honour of the man who brought out a wounded comrade from under the muzzles of the Boer rifles, or the Highland piper who played "the Cock of the North" with a bullet through his leg, and continued to pipe until another bullet smashed his chanter. Not they. The public is ever readier to be caught by a display of fireworks than by the steady combustion of a fire in a stove. The labour of the Army Service Corps is not brilliant. It is hard; it is monotonous. But, despite the monotony, the work is done. Let not the public, when it welcomes home its heroes, forget the honest service of the man-of-all-work. He has never received any thanks; so he'll appreciate it the more. A cheer, Britons, for the men of the A.S.C.!

The camp at Orange River grew rapidly as men and horses and beasts of transport poured into it every day. Finally, at the beginning of the last week in November, Lord Methuen had everything ready. His division was composed of three brigades—the Highland Brigade, the Brigade of Guards, and the 9th Brigade. Lord Methuen himself was a Guardsman, and the big fellows were sure to fight well under his eye. The 9th Brigade, under Major Featherstonhaugh, comprised five battalions of infantry, including three mounted companies. They were the 2nd Yorkshire Light Infantry, the 1st Battalion of the "Fighting Fifth" (Northumberland Fusiliers), the 1st Loyal North Lancashires, the 2nd Battalion Northamptonshire Regiment, and the Prince of Wales's (Yorkshire Regiment). The North Lancashires only mustered half a battalion, but they hoped soon to be at full strength. The other half was waiting at Kimberley.

Major-General Colville commanded the brigade of Guards, having under him the 2nd Coldstreams, the 2nd Scots Guards, and the 3rd Grenadiers. These were the men who could march past at a review better than any troops in Europe—fine big fellows, burning to distinguish themselves if only to confound those critics who said that the Guards could drill and that was

THE RECONNAISSANCE TOWARDS BELMONT.

all. They were soon to have a chance to show their mettle.

The next brigade was a kilted one. It comprised some of the most famous regiments in the service—the 2nd Royal Highlanders, popularly known as the Black Watch—though they always speak of themselves as the "Auld Forty-twa"—the 1st Highland Light Infantry, the Seaforths (2nd Battalion), and the 1st Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. These had not yet arrived at the front, being only then at Cape Town, but they were hurrying forward with all despatch. They meant business, these kilties, and went towards it joyfully. For were they not to be led to battle by their own well-beloved "Andra," the ill-fated, high-souled Wauchope? A brave soldier was Wauchope, and a type of the best in Scotland. Of ancient family, high-tempered, generous, a true and firm friend to his men, Wauchope of the Black Watch was at last to realise his life's dream. He was to command the Highland Brigade. And when Andrew Wauchope took the field at the head of four thousand lads in kilt and tartan, he was probably the proudest and happiest man on the field.

Besides these three well-defined brigades, there was a naval brigade—marines and seamen, which generally acted with the 9th Brigade. These men were the finest of any in the camp, "barrin'," as Kipling's Mr. Atkins says of the marine, "barrin' a inch in the arm and the chest, 'e's the double o' me and you." And so he is. The day was to come when General Methuen and the Kimberley Relief Column would thank God, and that most heartily, that the British sailor is what he is—a burly, ubiquitous, daredevil, resourceful fellow—never on his beam ends, either on sea or land.

My Lord Methuen had only one regiment of cavalry—the 9th Lancers—all too small a force. He was soon to discover, as his despatches eloquently testify, that without a large body of cavalry he could never be a match for this foe. He had some troops of Colonial scouts, Rimington's guides, commonly known as "Tigers" because round his hat each wore a strip of tiger-skin. Splendid fellows these were: wonderful scouts, daring riders, first-rate shots. Every man of them was picked by the commander personally; and most of them were young men of good Cape Colonial families of British descent. For the most part they were men who had lived the open-air life of the farmer.

Nor must a squadron of New South Wales Lancers be forgotten. These had been over to England from Australia for training; and, when the war broke out, had promptly volunteered for the front. Nothing had been more popular in the Mother Country than this offer of our cousins to go to the front when there was danger; and of all the troops who marched through London none were greeted with a heartier demonstration of goodwill than these. They were a magnificent set of men; men of grand physique. And their horsemanship even took away the breath of the "Tigers." It was only matched by their superb courage and contempt of danger.

In artillery, the Kimberley Relief Column was as deficient, as lamentably deficient, as it was in cavalry. In this arm Lord Methuen had been provided with only three batteries, all of field artillery. No horse artillery whatever was allowed to a force which ought to have been equipped above all things with a view to rapidity of movement. It had to take the offensive, of necessity; and it ought to have been able to follow up its every blow, to extract

the last bit of result from its every success. But it was not able. And that is why the Kimberley garrison, and the Kimberley women and the Kimberley children, ate horse for many a long day.

Besides the infantry, the cavalry, the irregulars, and the artillery, there were, of course, attached to the division some companies of Royal Engineers—the brains of the Army—a company of the Army Service Corps (which does everything), and a Field Hospital, with ambulances and bearers. And, be it said, never was battle-field surgery practised more skilfully than by the detachment of the Royal Army Medical Corps accompanying Lord Methuen's division. Its arrangements were almost superhumanly perfect.

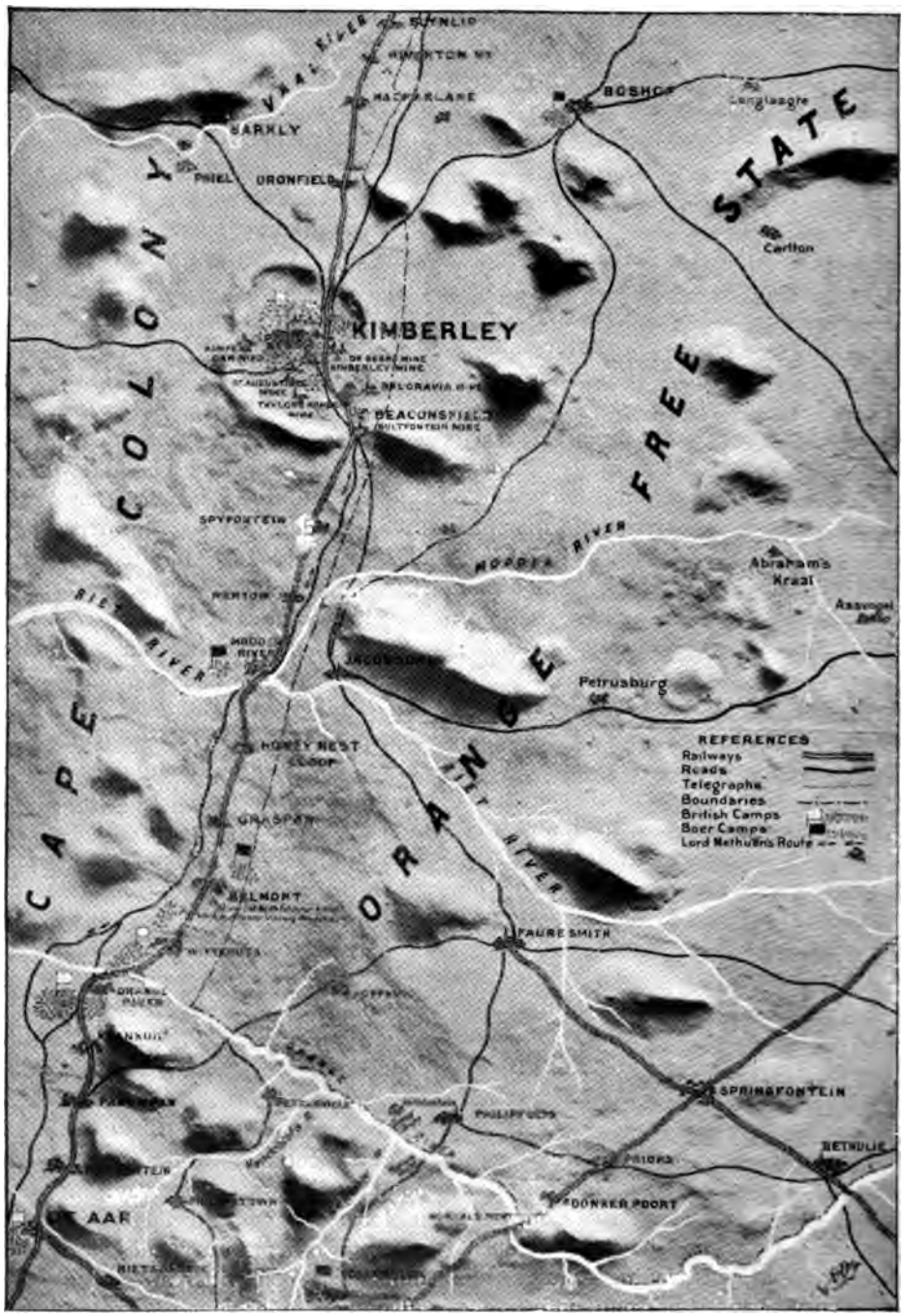
The task that lay before the Relief Column was to march about seventy miles. The whole of the way was hilly; and there were two rivers to be crossed, the Orange and the Modder. The first crossing would be easy enough; the second, only a little over a dozen miles from Kimberley, might be more difficult; for the Boers had broken down the railway bridge, and were reputed to have fortified very strongly the north bank and the whole of the ground between it and Kimberley.

On the 20th of November word went round the camp that the forward movement was to begin on the morrow. This was really very early; for the troops had only been in South Africa about a week. They had had three weeks aboard the transports; and the life there, though healthy enough, was hardly of the kind to keep men in condition for hard campaigning. The few days on land had been spent mostly in railway travelling—the rest in fatigue duty: camp work pure and simple.

Now it is quite certain that the only way to make troops fit for a campaign is by a liberal diet of marching, sham fights, and the like. Imagine—supposing that you are a person of average physical calibre—what you would feel like if, after a three weeks' voyage and a two or three days' train journey, you had to start a long walk, carrying on your person some forty to fifty pounds' weight. That is what the Kimberley Relief Column was asked to do.

Add to this want of condition two other circumstances. First, the climate. Nearly the whole force had come straight from an English November to a climate where the sun was positively blistering in its heat. If you lay down for half an hour with your neck exposed, you had blisters on the skin. And the curious way the dust rose, as has already been described, was another feature to be taken into account. It rained in those days, too—drenched you to the skin; and hardly had you recovered from the drenching ere the sun baked you.

Second, the atmosphere. Any rifleman will tell you that the density of air makes all the difference in rifle shooting. To hold a gun straight is not much for a man with a good wrist; to sight one is no great matter; but the difficult part of the business is to get the range at once—to find out, in other words, how far off is the object at which you aim. And this difficulty is greater in a hilly than a flat country. If you want to test this statement, try your eye at judging distances some day when you are in Cumberland, in the Highlands of Scotland, or on Exmoor. Take a point really two miles away. Some days it looks no more distant than a mile; while on others you would think it three miles off. You will realise, then, the disadvantage under which troops labour in a new country, especially if that country is



MAP SHOWING LORD METHUEN'S LINE OF ADVANCE BETWEEN **DE AAR AND KIMBERLEY.**

in a latitude, and has atmosphere of a density, totally different from the one in which they have been trained. The Loyal North Lancashires and Rimington's Scouts were the only troops, amongst those led by Lord Methuen, who had become acclimatised, and were accustomed to the distances as they appeared in South Africa. All the others had to be broken in; and, instead of being broken in by range practice and manœuvres, they were broken in during the campaign.

Lord Methuen meant to stick to the railway line, both as being his most direct route and as affording him easy means of communication with De Aar and Cape Town. Reinforcements and supplies could reach him from the sea in two days by this line. Now, between Orange River Station and the Modder there are some small villages, each with a station. In order, as you go from south to north, these are Witteputs, Belmont, Gras Pan (also spelt variously Graspan and Grass Pan), and Honey Nest Kloof. Now we know that when Colonel Gough made his last reconnaissance in force before the arrival of Lord Methuen, he found a strong party of the enemy with artillery in a well-fortified position four miles east of Belmont. The hill they occupied was called Kafirs Kop.* Since the date of that reconnaissance, this commando had received reinforcements it was said from Mafeking, and had also recruited somewhat from amongst the Cape Dutch of the vicinity.

Had the contingent been less strong, Lord Methuen would have let it alone—brushed past it, and held straight on along the railway to the Modder. But there being, according to scouts and other reports, some 2,500, the general dared not treat them as a negligible quantity. If he had, the moment he had gone by with his main body the commando might have cut in at his rear, pulled up the line between him and De Aar, and probably captured a lot of his stores; to say nothing of the dangers of a flank or rear attack from them when our men might be attacking the main Boer army in front.

So Lord Methuen moved up to Witteputs station on November 20th, determined to clear out the Belmonters at an early date. Like a wise general, he reconnoitred the enemy's position well before deciding on his plan of attack. One of the officers sent out in advance of the main body had a narrow squeak of it. He was a lieutenant, and had been sent forward with a few Lancers to spy out the land. He went on for a long time without seeing anybody, occasionally halting to make a note or a sketch in his note-book. Then he left his men, and rode on alone. Suddenly, as he was going up a hill, he saw some men in wideawakes. This was enough for him. He turned his horse and cantered down hill. But the others, who were also scouting, saw him too, and made for him at full speed; and their rough-country ponies were as good as his charger over ground of that sort. Still, they did not gain on him; and at last one of them pulled up, took a quick sight, and let fly Down dropped the charger.

The Boers gave a shout and came on again. But the modern British mania for athletics has not all been for evil; and the lieutenant ran as he had never run on the track. He simply tore down the hill. It is not the easiest thing in the world to run in spurred boots. Yet Mercury himself could not have given the young officer one yard of start in a hundred. At first the pursuers trusted to catch him alive.

* A kop is a high hill or a mountain. A kopje is a little hill—"je" being a diminutive.

They became enraged when they found themselves unable to gain perceptibly on him; so every now and then they halted and fired. The distance was not more than 500 yards at any time, and the shots went close enough. If a miss were not as good as a mile, it would have gone hard with the fugitive, and the British army would have been deprived of an enterprising officer. Fortunately, the rest of the patrol heard the firing in the distance. They galloped up at full speed; and only just in time; for the lieutenant had lost distance by reason of having to climb a wire fence, and was now being pelted from about 300 yards. He was breathless when the Lancers reached him. The Boers, baulked of their prey, faced about and galloped off; our men did not pursue, not knowing how many more there might be hidden on the hill-side.

On the morning of the 22nd, the day after his arrival at Witteputs, the general made a reconnaissance with his cavalry and artillery towards Belmont, and, with the aid of such information as Colonel Gough had gathered the day Keith-Falconer was killed, a pretty accurate idea was formed of the enemy's position. It appeared—and this was the information brought in by Kaffirs and others—that the commando originally posted near Belmont had recently been reinforced by a contingent sent by Cronje from the investment of Mafeking. It further appeared that the position had been very considerably strengthened since the date of the previous reconnaissance.

The Boers were masters in the art of fortifying a hill. They had with them a certain number of trained European officers, who knew the scientific part of the business of trench digging. They themselves were no mean strategists. And of labour there was no lack, for, besides the Boers themselves, there were hundreds of native blacks, mostly farm servants who accompanied their masters, and these would make a row or two of trenches in a space of time marvellously short. In fact, they had been known to make a very strong fortification in a single night.

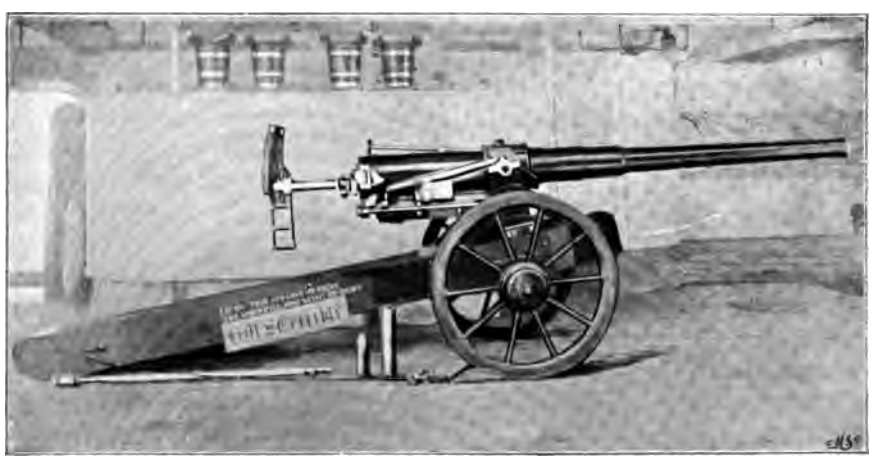
One of the dodges to which the Boers resorted—and the word "dodge" is used in no deprecatory sense—was, when they were constructing trenches on a hill or ridge top, not to throw out the earth in front of the trench, but behind it. This may seem strange. For, of course, the soil if thrown up in front would afford additional shelter. But they preferred the other way; and for this reason:—When a man shoots out of an entrenchment, he must raise himself a little way over the top. That is obvious, because unless he put his head outside he could not see the enemy. Now, if the head is visible against the sky-line, it immediately becomes a mark for the hostile sharpshooter. Wherefore the Boers piled the earth up behind, so that the heads of their riflemen would only have the brown earth for a background. And a brown head and face against a background of brown earth is not easily distinguishable.

Without doubt the South African Dutchman is "artful"—*slim* he would call it: expert in all the arts of guerilla warfare: applying with the intelligence of the European mind the lessons he had learned from the savages against whom, for three centuries, he had waged bloody, unrelenting war. And, though he had never lost his civilisation, he had acquired some of the self-preservative habits of the savage, and had learned every trick and every wile of the big-game hunter. One of these wiles was the system of entrenchment that have just been described.

It was a simple thing. But it is the simple thing that makes all the difference between success and failure.

Lord Methuen had also done a simple thing. Simple but effective. Probably it saved the lives of many scores. You remember how at Elandslaagte, at Talana Hill, and in the skirmish at Belmont the British officers had suffered terrible losses, and you will remember how those losses occurred—by reason of the fact that the officers differed markedly in dress and equipment from the rank and file. They wore sword belts with glittering buckles—swords with shining hilts. General Methuen changed all that. He knew that he was bound to lose some commissioned men, but he was resolved that their lives should not be foolishly thrown away. And therefore one of the first things that he did at Orange River Camp was to issue an order that officers should dress like the men, discarding sword and sword-belt and carrying a carbine. By another stroke of common sense he ordered that all the shiny parts of the men's equipment and arms should be painted or smeared brown, to match the khaki-coloured uniform. It was rather curious to see the smart Guardsmen rubbing their bayonets with mud. At home the great ambition of the Household troops seems to be to turn out as glittering as possible. Here a general, and an ex-Guardsman to boot, was actually found giving the order for everybody to smear his accoutrements with mud. It seems that a camp wit christened the column "Methuen's Mudlarks."

Late in the afternoon of the 22nd, the force moved on towards Belmont. Methuen had resolved to lose no time in offering battle.



THE SAILORS' TOY.
A 4·7 INCH QUICK-FIRER ON A SCOTT'S CARRIAGE.

CHAPTER XX.

ON THE ROAD TO KIMBERLEY—THE BATTLE OF BELMONT.

AS already stated, Lord Methuen moved out of his camp at Orange River on November 21st, and on the same day arrived at Witteputs, his immediate object being to bring to battle the Boer force at Belmont. The 22nd was spent in reconnoitring, and in the evening of that day Lord Methuen commenced operations. It was done in the usual style. He wanted to know the positions of the enemy's guns and how many of them there were, wherefore he advanced towards their kopjes with his field-guns and began shelling them. Soon the enemy replied, but only with one large gun. Our batteries were, as usual, beautifully handled, and the Long Tom not less so. The only difference was that while our shells usually burst, the enemy's were so badly fused that they exploded but rarely. There were field-guns on the kopjes, but the Boers, true to their policy of concealment, declined to fire them, so that their positions could not in the least be ascertained.

The results of the artillery duel were of the slightest. Two British were wounded, and (according to the official account) six Boers put *hors-de-combat* as the result of two hours' firing; and at the end of that time General Methuen withdrew to Witteputs to arrange his plan of attack.

The plan was this: A left flank attack by the 9th Brigade, under Major-General Featherstonhaugh, the brigade of Guards and Naval Brigade, under Major-General Colville, to march on the enemy's right, to hold them there, while two squadrons of the 9th Lancers and a company of Mounted Infantry were to keep wide out and well to the front on the left, ready to dash round and pursue the beaten enemy. The attack was to be delivered at break of day, and the men, in order to be ready for that time, were to move off from Witteputs about 1.30 a.m. and to reach their positions at 3 a.m. The march was to be a silent one, for it was intended, if possible, to surprise the enemy.

Shortly after midnight the men were turned out, and, by way of something to march on, hot coffee was served out all round. Then at about the hour fixed the troops marched out silently into the darkness. The Northumberland Fusiliers led on the left, the Grenadier Guards (3rd Battalion) on the right, with the Northamptons and Yorkshire Light Infantry in the centre of the two brigades. The Guards were to rendezvous at a little platelayer's cottage on the railway, but the distance was miscalculated, and they were half an hour late. Their next objective was a hill called Gun Kopje, skirting round another kopje to reach it. The Grenadiers and Scots Guards were to attack Gun Kopje, while the other kopje was to be dealt with by two battalions of Coldstreams, who acted as the reserves of the brigade.

On marched the stalwart pets of London, eager to show that they were of use for something more than full dress parades and show marching. It began to be light about 4 a.m., but only with a flickering, grey dawn—a kind of light which tempts

one to use his eyes only to deceive him. There was little wonder, under the circumstances, that men who knew nothing of the country should make mistakes; and so it befell that Lieutenant-Colonel Crabbe, commanding the 3rd Grenadiers, mistook one kopje for another, and, instead of attacking Gun Kopje, led his men to the assault of the hill reserved for the Coldstreams. The mistake was natural enough and excusable enough, but it led to a complete alteration in the plan of attack. The original scheme was entirely upset, and the force found itself attacking in front instead of on the flank.

There is little doubt that this alteration doubled our loss and halved that of the enemy.

THE ATTACK ON THE KOPJE.

Fortune favoured us somewhat, for the thin brown line of the Grenadiers was within 250 yards of the enemy's position ere it was discovered. One unfortunate thing about the mistake of the Grenadiers was that the side of the hill upon which the attack was delivered was the very worst slope of the kopje. It was

steep and boulder-strewn, and the very perfection of the Guards' dressing was against them. Still, up they went silently, fearlessly, and boldly until the enemy suddenly began to fire from the summit.

Lord Methuen, who was in the rear directing the battle, soon saw that someone had blundered, and, finding himself committed to a frontal attack, commanded that the whole of the second line of the 9th Brigade, the Yorkshire Light Infantry and two companies of Munster Fusiliers should be detached from their brigade and support the Guards in the plan that had been forced upon him. This left the Northumberlands and the Northamptons unsupported and unable to carry out their original orders. Practically all they could do was to occupy a ridge in front of a higher ridge held by the enemy and engage in a rifle duel. Before they came to the ridge, however, they had to clear detached parties of Boers out of positions on the hills, and to clear them out of a fortified position on a hill called Table Mountain.

The Fighting Fifth maintained the reputation of the regiment that day. They were on the extreme left of the 9th Brigade, and during the night march had been steered by compass, Lieutenant Festing acting as guide. When they reached Table Mountain they found it occupied and the enemy in entrenchments, having also stone sangars as cover. And, as you know, and as our men knew well enough, a Boer rifleman with plenty of cover is a dangerous foe. But the Fifth, and their friends the Northamptons, kept at it undismayed. Here and there a man fell as the battalions, well spread out, moved up the height. Festing, whose services had been so valuable, was amongst the wounded. Still the infantry pressed up, firing as they went. Closer and closer still they drew to the top of the hill, and the enemy, seeing them so near, did not wait to be charged, but fled to the ridge in front of their main position. The British infantry followed them, and again stormed the position, suffering great loss by reason of the want of cover. And then the general commanding, seeing that the Boer main position was too strong to be stormed in the same way, sent an order for the 9th Brigade to occupy the last position it had won until the main position should have been shelled by the field-guns.

Meanwhile the Guards on the right were hard at it. The Grenadiers, though they might be attacking in the wrong place, were still attacking, and were doing it with spirit and energy. They pressed up the kopje with calm, quiet determination, firing volleys sometimes, and sometimes individually.* There is a vicious, determined-looking Boer a little way up the hill. His foot is shattered, but he blazes away at us, and we blaze away in return. Lieutenant Blundell sees him and observes his plight, and instantly orders his men not to fire at the wounded wretch any longer. He himself rises out of cover and goes forward, intending to bring the wounded man into safety; but, as he approaches, the Dutchman levels his rifle and shoots his would-be rescuer through the body. The range is point-blank; and the poor young officer, after a few moments of agony, sinks dead on the hill-side.

* "Volley firing" is when the section, company, or battalion, as the case may be, fires unanimously and simultaneously. The word "Fire!" is given by the officer, and every trigger is pulled at the same instant. "Individual firing" is when each man fires as he pleases, the only word given being "Commence!" After that the men go on until "Cease fire!" is sounded. A volley is especially useful to stop a rush.

Colonel Crabbe, the officer commanding the battalion, is shot in much the same way by a wounded Boer whom he approached on succour intent.

They are undoubtedly vicious, and their notions of propriety are not as ours are; and, after a third officer has been shot by a wounded Boer, the Grenadiers go mad, and vow to give no quarter. Their officers have a difficult task to restrain them from bayoneting all and sundry, whether quarter is asked or not. And little wonder; for the shooting of Blundell was little less than cold-blooded murder. Still, it would not be fair to blame the whole Boer nation for a few isolated acts of individuals, and a good deal must be ascribed to ignorance. The last hundred yards of the kopje was of the rockiest description. It was quite impossible for the Grenadiers to fire as they advanced; so guns had to be slung, for hands as well as feet must be used in the climbing. The Boers had now an uninterrupted opportunity, and they used it to the full. The air seemed alive with bullets, and the Grenadiers fell fast. Still they clambered up steadily, and—ominous sign—in perfect silence.

Lieutenant Fryer, the adjutant of the battalion, is one of the foremost in the assault, leading the way and cheering on his men. The rank and file follow him, delighted, for nothing pleases Tommy so much as to be well and pluckily led. Suddenly the gallant officer falls—struck through the brain. The men rush on to avenge him, cheering fiercely. Their blood is up now, and they feel that nothing can stop them. Hands and knees are torn by the jagged rocks. Men slip and fall and cut themselves horribly on the stones, but they mind it not a whit. Their colonel is down; half a dozen more officers are down. The rest rush to the front and wave their men on. At last they near the crest; and then "Fix bayonets!" The bugle sounds. One terrific rush, the Grenadiers cheering as they fall on. The defenders load and fire up to the last minute; but they cannot stand the cold steel, and, as the Guards begin the slaying in grim and bloody earnest, most of the Boers throw down their guns and run.

The Guardsman may have his disadvantages. He has not quite so much hard training as other soldiers have. During his period of service the capital claims him for her own most of the time. He is not sent to Egypt and to India, to Hong Kong and the Cape, to the West Indies and Ceylon, or elsewhere, as other battalions are sent, to be hardened and toughened and seasoned and trained. He is retained to adorn the metropolis. But let every man have his due. The Guardsman never shirked his share of active service. More than that, he has always proved himself entirely worthy of the high standing of the Household Troops.

A battalion of Guards going into action is one of the finest sights in the world. There is none of the grim, let-us-get-there-and-kill-somebody rush of a kilted regiment. There is none of the fiery *élan* of an Irish charge. But there is a steady majesty, typically British. The Guards are "swells." It is as much beneath their dignity to bustle as it would be to waver; and in this battle of Belmont, let the Boers' fire be never so deadly and so hot, the Guardsman changed not his pace. Only when it came to the bayonet work did he lose the composure of his demeanour.

A bayonet charge by the Guards, when they do get to close quarters, is terrific. The men are so powerful and so heavy that the steel drives straight through everything. At Belmont one Grenadier

thrust with such vigour that he actually drove his *rifle* through the breastbone of his victim. It was fatal. Fatal to the Briton as well as to the Boer. For, ere the burly Guardsman could wrench his weapon free, another Boer clapped rifle to shoulder and took a snapshot. At that distance —it was no more than twenty yards—he could hardly miss ; and the Grenadier, still grasping the stock of his rifle, fell lifeless over the body of the man whom he had slain. Such are the grim and awful tragedies of war. And this fine soldier was only one of twenty-three stark fellows who were buried next day in a single grave.

A shout of triumph rends the air. Helmets are stuck on bayonets and waved frantically; and the army knows that one battalion has tasted blood.

LIEUT.-GENERAL FORESTIER-WALKER, COMMANDING LINES OF COMMUNICATION.
(Photo: Russell & Sons, Limited.)

Meanwhile the 1st Scots Guards, who were to have co-operated with the Grenadiers in the attack on Gun Kopje, have marched straight to their appointed spot. They set to work at once—about 4.15 a.m., and ere the sun is well above the horizon, have rushed the hill in tremendous style with the bayonet. Their killed were few, and they lost no time in advancing to the assault of another kopje nearer to the Boer main position. A prisoner who was captured thus expresses himself: "It is no good firing on you. The more we fire the faster you come on." And he seemed to consider it a grievance.

The march of the 2nd Scots Guards—the only battalion of the Guards' Brigade which carried out its original orders—was a fine one. Gun Kopje was a hill of great strength naturally ; and it had been admirably entrenched, thus rendering it exceedingly difficult to carry by assault without the help of artillery. But the Scots reached the foot of the hill when there was only the very faintest morning light, and so silently did they march that they were half way up the kopje ere the Boers knew anything about it.

As might have been expected, as soon as the defenders were warned they lined the crest of the hill and emptied their rifles into the advancing battalion. But they could not see distinctly, or calculate the distance very exactly, in the half-light, and this, together with the fact that the Scots Guards were in a wide, loose line, with plenty of interval between the men, rendered the defence less effectual than otherwise it would have been. Besides, the Boers were surprised. As for the Scots, they wasted neither time nor ammunition in shooting at an invisible foe. One order was given—"Fix bayonets! Charge!" And the remaining 200 yards was covered in two minutes.

Here is the first trench—five yards ahead. With a wild shout the line leaps forward. Bayonets are carried at the charge. They breast the hill-crest to find—one solitary Boer, who promptly yields himself prisoner. The others have scuttled down the other side of the hill.

The two battalions of the Coldstreams advanced from the platelayer's cottage as

soon as Gun Hill was taken, making for the hill assigned to them—the hill which the Grenadiers were now assaulting by mistake. The 1st Battalion was marching along across the front of another kopje called Mount Blanc, when there blazed from the summit a tremendous musketry fire. Now the Coldstreams, like their brethren the Grenadiers, had lost direction. They ought never to have been within firing distance of Mount Blanc at all ; but, finding themselves there and in course of being enfiladed* at no more than 800 yards, they did as the Grenadiers had done—they went straight at the enemy where they found him. Colonel Coddington, officer commanding, swung round his left so as to face Mount Blanc, and, having now no choice, commenced a frontal attack on it.

The ground, though difficult, was not so very bad, and in the half-light of the early morning the Coldstreams swarmed up the kopje in splendid style. Not a Boer was to be seen from the bottom of the hill, and the only thing the Coldstreams could shoot at was the sky-line—not a very exhilarating performance. But not much time was wasted. "Fix bayonets!" Steel rang on steel. "Charge!" And the Coldstreams doubled up the hill in beautiful order. So fierce did they look—so much like a brown hedge bristling with bayonets that, as their line got closer and closer, the hearts of the Dutchmen became as water, and they fled—not, of course, from the field, but back to their main position on Kafirs Kop.

The artillery now came into action, one battery going to the assistance of the Northamptons and Northumberlands, who held a ridge on the left front of the enemy's position, and the naval guns making play on some heights on the right.

The Northumberlands and Northamptons were firing on the enemy and receiving his fire in return from about 1,000 yards in front ; and another party of Boers had established themselves on the left of our men's ridge, and, sheltered by sangars of stones, were sending in a most annoying fire at 200 yards. This had to be stopped somehow, and a party of the 5th was sent to storm the kopje held by the nearer party. It was no joke. The Boers had one of their ideal positions, where they were able to fire with little danger to themselves of being hit in return ; and, as the Northumberlands advanced to the attack, the Mausers spat out death and wounds. Spread out in skirmishing order, the attackers advanced, taking what cover they could, some lying down and firing at the top of the crest while their comrades pushed on.

Up they go, undaunted by the shower of lead, and at last, having suffered half an hour's fire, the order comes, "Fix bayonets! Charge!" At the blast of the bugle the Fighting Fifth springs into line, and in two minutes reaches the crest. As usual, the Boers shrink from the bayonet, and only a very few feel the steel. They are not, however, without pluck, for fifty yards along the top of the crest is a sangar held by thirty of them ; and for several minutes these few keep the Northumberlands at bay. Five hundred rifles are turned on the little fortification, and at last a white flag is hoisted. At sight of it our men cease firing and stand up. Instantly a shot is fired from the sangars. This is too much ; and, despite command, a party, with bayonets at the charge, starts forward.

* An enfilading fire is one coming from the side, so as to sweep across the battalion. Thus, if a battalion is marching from west to east and the enemy fires on it from a position on north or south, this is "enfilading" ; and a very dangerous fire it is.

But no more shots are fired. Instead, a bearded man bearing the emblem of surrender, followed by eleven comrades, unarmed, steps forward ; and the Northumberlands have taken their first prisoners. The rest of the bold band of Dutchmen has fallen to our rifles.

Up to this time the fight has been somewhat disconnected. And for this reason. The position occupied by the enemy was a double one, consisting of one high ridge protected in front and flank by kopjes. All these kopjes were occupied and fortified by them, and they retired to the main position as soon as our men turn them out at bayonet point. So that there has been no fewer than four independent assaults. But, these positions having been captured, there remains the great Kafirs Kop.

Methuen ordered up his naval guns, and immediately began to shell the enemy ; and the Boers, now somewhat disheartened by being turned out of positions believed by them to be impregnable, soon have enough of it. At six o'clock they begin to retire. Large bodies of horsemen trek across the plateau behind the main ridge, a fact plainly visible to Lord Methuen, who orders a general advance of his infantry and sends his Lancers round by the railway to cut into the retreating column. The enemy do not retire all at once, however. A party of riflemen remains to hold the ridge, what time the guns are mounted on waggons and hurried away. And as our battalions steadily advance to the final attack, the men in the trenches rush to the rear, mount their hardy ponies, and gallop off at full speed to join the retiring column.

By half-past six (a.m.) it is all over ; the Guards and the Northumberlands have gained the Boer position, bayoneting the few whom they find there, except such as surrender unarmed. The Lancers struggle to overtake the beaten enemy, now nearly two miles away. But their efforts are useless. First, they are detained by a strong wire fence that has to be cut. Then, their horses are tired and out of condition, for they have only been five days on shore—mostly travelling—after being cooped up aboard the transport for three weeks. Two fresh and fit regiments of cavalry, with a battery of Horse Artillery, could have turned the Boer retreat into a rout—might have cut the whole force off, headed round it, and compelled it either to stand and fight or disperse in all directions, leaving its guns behind.

But it was not to be. The Lancers struggled on gamely and cut off a few stragglers, but their tired horses, unacclimatised as yet, were no match for the fresh, sturdy ponies of the enemy ; and, after one despairing effort, in which our horsemen came within rifle range of the column, the pursuit had to be abandoned.

Nevertheless, Methuen's victory was not without result. He took 50 prisoners. He found 83 dead Boers on the field and 20 wounded, and there was reason to believe that most of the wounded and some of the killed had been carried off ; for the Boers had a way of tying a dead body to a horse's back by means of leather thongs. He captured 100 horses, and, what was more valuable, 64 waggons, four large cylinders of powder, 750 shrapnel, and 5,000 rounds of small-arm ammunition. The waggons, powder and ammunition he destroyed. And he also took great herds of sheep and cattle and some forage which came in handy for his Lancers.

The victory was not so complete as it might have been. Many blunders had been made. But, still, it was a victory,

THE CHAPLAIN'S HEROISM.

and Lord Methuen was now free to resume his march towards Kimberley.

During the storming of the kopje by the Northamptons, a striking incident took place. Somehow or other a chaplain named Hill had pushed his way right up into the firing line, and when the advance began the man of peace trotted forward with his "boys" over the rough boulder-clad face of the kopje. Suddenly just beside him a man was struck down by a bullet in his head. He was not killed, and as he rolled over in his agony he caught sight of the chaplain.

"I'm done for now, *padre*," he groaned. The *padre* hesitated not a moment. He stood erect and walked deliberately over to the man. Drawing a Bible from his pouch, he knelt down with his back to the enemy, and in a calm voice began to read the comforting words. The groans of the stricken man ceased and he listened eagerly.

"Come back and lie down, sir!" cried an officer angrily. "You've no right to risk your life in that way."

"This is my place, and I am doing my own special work," replied the chaplain steadily. And he did continue until the man's eyes closed in death. It is one of the most marvellous things in the whole of this marvellous war that the chaplain—exposed and motionless as he was, offering the best target in the world—was not instantly killed. One can only attribute it to that unknown Power stronger than Chance, which now and again steps in to forbid the action of what we poor weak mortals call "Certainty."

It was one o'clock—the battle was over before eleven a.m.—ere the soldiers broke their fast. At that hour they reached the camp at Witteputs, the camp they had left at midnight. Thirteen hours without food, when those thirteen hours have been spent in marching and shooting and lying down in a blazing sun, seems a long time; and some of the men—the Guardsmen especially—suffered agonies of sickness. The heat was terrible at noon, and more than one man fell out on the march back to camp from weariness, hunger, and the scorching rays of the sun. Some of the men had captured Boer ponies in the laager, and, to the admiration of their comrades, mounted them and rode triumphally back to camp.

That night the whole force bivouacked outside Witteputs. There were no tents: there was little supper; for the column was marching light—intending to drive the Boers away and follow them up—and supplies were to be sent along by rail. So the men, after numberless yarns round camp fires, wrapped themselves each in his blanket and lay down in rows on the veldt by companies and by battalions. And soundly they slept too; nor were they in the least the worse for the experience. For the South African climate, dust-storms and tropical sun notwithstanding, is a healthy one. The air is pure and highly oxygenated; and one can camp out there without much fear of rheumatism and its attendant ills.

It was a weird sight to see 8,000 men lying in rows under the stars—every one motionless, steeped in heavy slumber, the pale cold light of the moon making it appear that it was an army of corpses laid out in winding sheets for burial

And twenty miles or so away a ragged-looking set of men were busy on a row of kopjes, digging and marking out lines. For the Boers, though driven off, were not routed nor demoralised, and were bent on making another stand.

CHAPTER XXI.

WITH METHUEN—ENSLIN.

ON the 23rd November Methuen's force rested for the remainder of the day, after returning from Belmont to their camp at Witteputs. The wounded, thanks to some excellent work by Surgeon-Colonel Townsend, of the Royal Army Medical Corps, were comfortably housed by one p.m. the same day; and after the wounds had been dressed, arrangements were made for sending them back—the less severe cases to Orange River, the more dangerous cases to Cape Town. By five p.m. on the 24th all the wounded were *en route* for the south in comfortable hospital trains; and Lord Methuen mentioned Townsend in despatches as having accomplished "the most perfect work I have ever heard of in war."

The 24th was a day of rest, preparatory to resumption of the route to Kimberley. It should be said that Lord Methuen was marching light—that is, with as little transport as possible; and consequently the food was strictly limited in quantity. At the time some complaints reached England on this account, but, in fairness to the much-abused Commissariat Department, it should be stated that nobody was to blame. A column marching light cannot carry full rations. But, despite the pangs of hunger, the men were very fit and highly pleased with their exploit of the previous day, and anxious to follow up the enemy.

They were soon to have an opportunity to show their mettle again, for the general only allowed them one day's rest. He had heard that at a place called Gras Pan, some seven miles to the north of Belmont, a body of 400 Boers and two guns had been posted. An armoured train, proceeding up the line towards Enslin, was stopped by the guns, and hastened back with the intelligence. It was resolved to make an attempt to capture this little force by an attack of artillery on each flank, supported by the cavalry and mounted infantry, thrown well forward. The other active troops were to be the 9th Brigade—depleted by the leaving behind at Belmont of two companies of Munster Fusiliers—and the Naval Brigade. As to the Guards, one battalion (1st Scots Guards) was left behind at Belmont with the two companies of Munster Fusiliers to repel an apprehended raid on communications, while the other three battalions, under Sir H. Colville, were to follow with baggage to Enslin.

At 3.30 a.m. on the 25th (November) the 9th and Naval Brigades started out with the artillery; and all in high feather. The sailors and marines rolled along in great style, their gait contrasting forcibly with the stiff-backed marching of the infantry. Lt.-Colonel Money, of the Northumberland Fusiliers, commanded the 9th Brigade as senior colonel, in place of Featherstonhaugh, wounded at Belmont. Captain Prothero led the naval men. In addition to the Fighting Fifth, the 9th Brigade consisted of the 2nd Northamptons, half a battalion Loyal North Lancashires, and the 2nd King's Own Yorkshire Light

THE MAXIM OF THE WEST YORKSHIRES IN ACTION.

Infantry. They swung along in the cool of the early morning. The sun rose and found them still swinging along, and at 6.30 a.m. the Boer position was reached The action then began.

But Lord Methuen was unpleasantly surprised to find that his information as to the Boer strength was quite misleading. Instead of there being only 400 burghers at Gras Pan, there were six times that number at least, and, instead of only two guns, they had six, as well as two machine guns—one Hotchkiss and one Maxim This was serious, because it meant that the attacking force, though stronger than the defenders, was not overwhelmingly strong: not, in fact, so much as two to one. And so, as soon as the British general discovered how large was the number opposed to him, he heliographed to Colville to bring the Guards to support the attack. It was no longer a question of surrounding and capturing an isolated commando. It was a question of driving out of a strong position a considerable force.

Colville responded to his chief's request with the greatest alacrity. He had set out three hours later than Methuen, with the baggage train, and received the flashing message some half an hour later. He also heard heavy firing near Gras Pan, and sent back to Belmont for the 1st Scots Guards, who hurried to join their comrades. Leaving the 1st Coldstreams to protect the baggage, the 2nd Coldstreams and 3rd Grenadiers were thrown out in extended line

and marched north, to be joined, ere long, by the Scots Guards, who were placed on the left of the line. It was one of the most superb sights in the world — three battalions of Guards advancing in extended order in line.

Let us now see what the 9th Brigade and the sailors were doing. They did not waste much time. The Boers occupied two high hills and some lesser kopjes, all fortified in the two high ones very strongly. Methuen's batteries were very soon at work on his left and right, shelling the position with shrapnel. For the plan of attack was not like that at Belmont, *i.e.* a surprise at dawn, but more nearly resembling the tactics at Elandslaagte. It was to be a cannonade followed by an infantry attack. But the infantry attack, or rather the storming of the position, was not to be undertaken at once and against the whole force by our whole force. It was to be concentrated on the left front of the Boer position—that is, on one only of the two high hills referred to. As to the hill on the right, the enemy here was simply to be "held": to be prevented from assisting those on the left-hand hill.

Wherefore the troops were thus ordered. The Northumberland Fusiliers, five companies, were to operate against the right-hand hill (our left) by crawling under cover to a little ridge opposite and keeping up a heavy rifle fire. Two companies of the same battalion were to act as escort to the guns. It is a military rule that guns in action should have an infantry escort, otherwise the enemy might send a few sharpshooters within rifle range to pick off the gunners. If this should be attempted, the infantry escort is there to deal with the enemy's riflemen. The Northumberlands, though to be of use, were not to have the glory of the attack. They had been specially favoured at Belmont by being sent to storm a position. It was the turn of somebody else to-day.

The rest of the 9th Brigade and the Naval Brigade were led towards the left-hand hill (our right). The ground was being prepared for them. The battery on our right was hurling shrapnel at the kop with bewildering rapidity. At the rate of four a minute, our 15-pound shells flew over the open ground at the spots where heaps of stones proclaimed the presence of the enemy. Never were guns better served. The Boers, with their usual excellence of gunnery, aimed well and got the range of our batteries to a nicety, and for some time shells dropped round our gunners. But, nothing daunted, the men of the Royal Artillery held on. The battery on the left joined in also, and for half an hour shelled with deadly accuracy the main kopje on the enemy's left.

It had been resolved to carry this height by an infantry attack what time the other kopje was held in check by the Northumberlands; and the Naval Brigade and the Yorkshire Light Infantry were selected for the task. The Northamptons had it in hand to work round on the same position.

Now comes the word "Advance!" and the men who keep the seas for Britain go boldly forward. They have to cross open ground for 400 yards before reaching the first slope; and the command is to advance in open order. This the sailors and marines do admirably, and suffer little at first. But fifty yards from the foot of the slope Commander Ethelstan falls, and several men bite the dust. Still on they press, and, as they reach the slope, by some dangerous instinct the space between the files is lessened, and the men converge upon the position. Fatal error! It costs them many a life, for the too close line

gives the riflemen behind the sangars a target they can hardly miss; and at 1,600 yards the Mauser fire becomes thick as hail. Still the hardy seamen do not slacken. They load and fire and press on, with a contempt of death and danger such as has ever distinguished the Navy. The officers of this brigade wear swords, and suffer accordingly. Ethelstan's wound is mortal. Prothero, captain of marines, is down.

Jones, a lieutenant of marines, commanding a company, has a bullet in his thigh. What? To the rear? No, my lads, to the front! And the plucky officer, bleeding all the way, still leads on his men. When commissioned men grow scarce, petty officers take command, and without a check hold on their way.

And now a terrible shout is heard, as a long thin line of brown-clad forms swings out into the open. It is the Yorkshiremen coming into battle. If there is a tougher battalion in the world than this, be pleased to name it. It has come from Mauritius; and the men, inured to tropic suns, are in the pink of condition. A crackle of musketry, a storm of lead greets them, but they come on as one man. They yield to none: so says their proud motto—"*Cede nullis*"; and they have all the hardiness of their Yorkshire stock and the stubborn spirit of men born north of the Humber.

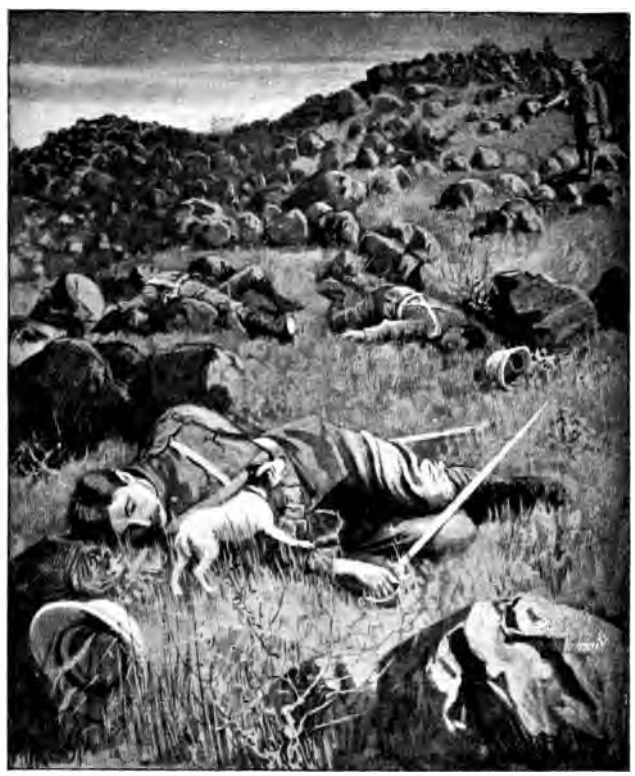
Better trained than the sailors for land fighting, they avoid the mistake of a close formation, and as they come on they take what cover they can. There are crack shots, too, among the Tykes; and when they fire the Boers know they have met their match. The farmers cannot believe these to be the *rooineks* they have heard of, the men who cannot shoot. These men in khaki dash and glide from cover to cover, never losing line, every man bent steadfastly towards the hill-top. A Boer sharpshooter, ensconced behind a boulder, is taking heavy toll. Ten times his rifle has flashed out, and six of the Light Infantry are lying on the hillside. But his own time is short. One, Waterhouse, a colour-sergeant, has spotted him, and vows to bring him down. Creeping up, the colour-sergeant at last obtains a bit of cover whence he can see the marksman next time he puts his head up. A sighting shot, just to get the range. Try it at 1,200. The bullet chips the boulder, but a little high. Another at 1,150. Yes! that is the distance. And Waterhouse lies down to wait for his prey.

It is like a cat watching a mousehole—a game of patience. Soon the Boer shows from behind the great stone. His rifle goes up. But, lo! before he can pull the trigger he reels. He will take no more toll, for a Lee-Metford bullet has gone through his brain. And the Tykes shout with exceeding loudness, and press on the harder. It was a cool exploit, for had Waterhouse missed his man his life would almost certainly have paid the forfeit. Wherefore, out of all the men who fought that day in the storming of the kopje, the name of Colour-Sergeant Waterhouse was selected for mention in despatches.

Steadily, almost contemptuously, the sailors and the Yorkshiremen press on. They are gaining ground yard by yard, and it is clear that nothing can stop them. Now is the time to press the attack. Still clambering, the firing line keeps up a steady advance. The first gradual slope is passed, and the men now face the steepest part of the kopje, the final climb. Forward, Loyal North Lancashires! Let the red rose help the white! And with light tread and the battle light shining in every face the

four companies of the Loyal Regiment rush for the kopje.

And you, gunners, show what you can do. The kopje is so steep now that to fire down on our men the Boers must lean over their stoneworks. Let them have it!



THE FAITHFUL TERRIER: A PATHETIC INCIDENT AT ENSLIN.

Drive them to cover! And shrapnel shrieks and bursts upon the sangars. The Boers show no disposition to face it, and their firing seems to fade away. The opportunity has arrived for the infantry. "Fix bayonets!" "Charge!" The bugle sounds the welcome note. Every rifle now becomes a pike, as the short steel blade is fixed upon the muzzle. One cheer! A roaring, thrilling cheer; and the sailors and marines, Light Infantry, and Lancashires tumble over the breastwork of boulders.

They have won! Hurrah! And from the dauntless sailors and the no less dauntless Yorkshiremen peals out the shout of victory. And the Boers—where are they? Gone. Vanished like a dream. The British footmen snarl. The cowards! They are ready enough to shoot us down at a distance. Why don't they stand up to us like men and come to hand grips? For to the British fighting man it seems and always will seem a dastard's trick to run away when the rush comes. But we cannot help it. Some day, perhaps, we shall catch

them before they have time to run; and then—ah! then.

All is not yet over. The enemy has still his kopje on the right, upon which our batteries are playing. We will treat him to a little musketry practice, which he will enjoy none the more because we shall enfilade him.

The fight cannot last much longer. Every rifle of the 9th Brigade, every field-gun, and every weapon of the naval battery is turned upon the remaining kopje, and the Boer commandant finds his quarters too hot. So he retreats—in good order and with little loss, for his own ponies are fresh, and we have no cavalry or horse artillery to dash upon him and annihilate him. He removes all his guns and most of his killed and wounded. What can be done is done. The field battery on the right gallops round and sends shrapnel amongst the Boer horsemen. They bring down a few, but field artillery is not quite the weapon with which to pursue a flying foe; and that more especially when there is no cavalry to accompany it.

Whilst this was going on, the ambulance men began their ghastly work of searching for the dead and the maimed. In a field such as that of Enslin, where the main execution was done on a hill thickly studded with boulders of various shapes and sizes, it was not an easy matter to distinguish the still, khaki-clad forms of the killed. The searchers had looked carefully over the main kopje, and had collected, as they thought, all the fallen, when they were attracted by a shrill bark which appeared to come from a heap of rocks behind them. They quickly returned, and found the body of Major Plumbe of the Marine Light Infantry, who had been killed during the assault of the main kopje. The barks proceeded from the throat of a faithful pet terrier of his, which had followed its master up the hill in the thickest of the fire, and which, when he was killed, had stood guard over his body for six hours until the ambulance and stretcher bearers came out.

That day the column continued its march to Enslin, where it camped by the railway. The Naval Brigade, minus six officers and ninety-seven men killed and wounded, still kept on looking jolly; as well they might, for they had come out of the ordeal with credit. As for the Yorkshires, the force which shared with the sailors the brunt of the fighting, seven killed and thirty-seven wounded was the price they had paid. Yet they, too, strode into camp proudly. Hard as nails, they marched to Enslin as they might have marched into camp at Aldershot, without any trace in their demeanour of the three hours' hard fighting they had engaged in.

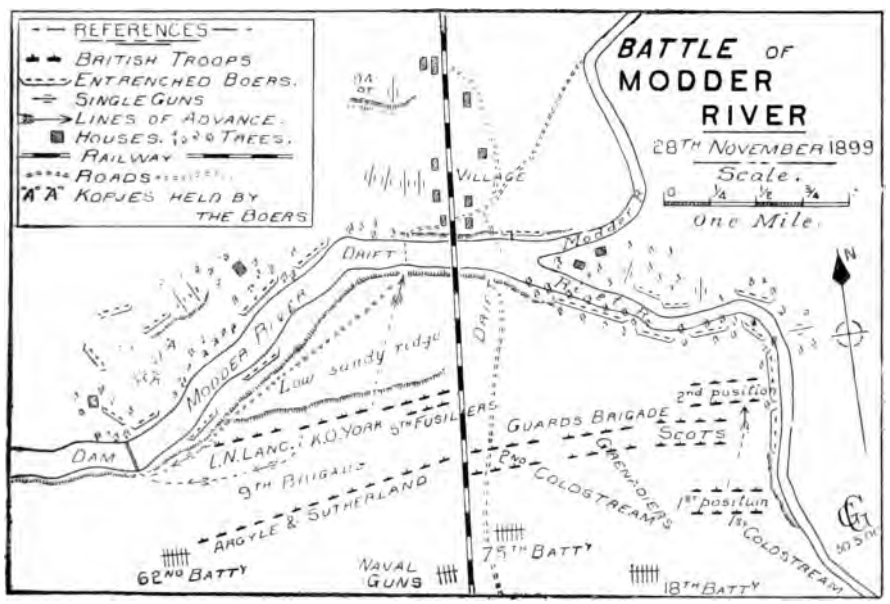
A biscuit or two, a loaf of bread here and there, and the weary troops wrapped themselves in their greatcoats and flung themselves on the ground. They might be tired. They certainly were hungry. But they minded none of these things. For were they not victorious?

CHAPTER XXII.

MODDER RIVER.

AFTER the spirited affair at Gras Pan, Lord Methuen rested his forces for a whole day (November 26th) at Enslin. Provisions were brought up to the camp there from Orange River camp, and the men rested for two nights. They had plenty to talk about, for all had been under fire by this time; and when the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders arrived in the camp, they heard some wonderful stories of extraordinary shooting, of Boers bayoneted in batches, and other yarns of the old soldiers as the men foregathered round the camp fires.

General Methuen was under strict orders to relieve Kimberley with all speed; and he therefore resolved to push on. The military authorities at that time expected —so it was hinted in the camp—that



MAP SHOWING POSITIONS OF BRIGADES AT MODDER RIVER.

before Christmas Day Gatacre would have have driven the invaders out of the north of Cape Colony, Kimberley would have been relieved, and Methuen and Gatacre would have marched on Bloemfontein from south and west.

Now a general has many things to think of in addition to strategy and tactics. Napoleon said that an army moves on its

stomach. The Iron Duke is reported to have declared, in the course of the Peninsular campaign, that he might or might not be a good general, but no one could deny that he was a good commissariat officer. Roberts won the title "Baron of Kandahar" as much by his excellent arrangements for the supply of necessaries to the troops as by any other thing. And in South Africa, the general commanding troops had to think especially of the water-supply. Those who sit at home at ease, and have only to turn the tap to be at once put into connection with the Lea or the Thames or Loch Katrine, can hardly realise the importance of this continual South African problem.

After halting for a day at Enslin, Methuen pushed on to Witkop, a few miles nearer the Modder River. Witkop had two advantages—it was an easy march from the Modder, and there was plenty of good, healthy water. Your water for troops must, if possible, be healthy in such a hot climate, where drinking is a necessity. The next move was to cross the Modder at, as near as possible, the railway bridge, and occupy the village of Modder River on the north bank. Thence General Methuen intended to march away from the railway to the right, and deliver his attack on the main body of Boers which blocked his route to Kimberley, and was reported to be at Spytfontein.

Spies — black, white, and brown — brought in the news to headquarters that the Boers had crossed the Modder, and had really retired on the main body; that, at all events, there were no Boers worth mentioning on the north bank, and that the passage would be practically unopposed. Also, that the river was fordable—easily fordable by wading. These tidings were pleasant enough; but there was a Rimington's Scout who had been into Modder River village, and he reported that the houses were strongly fortified and held in force. To solve the problem, Lord Methuen himself, with his staff, rode forward to reconnoitre. He rode forward almost to the bank of their river, an easy approach, for on the south bank the country is quite flat. Only on the north are there kopjes.

The village seemed quiet. There was no appearance of any force. No camp, no noise, no ramparts or earthworks, no herds of cattle or horses. True, there were a few—perhaps a hundred—Boers seen loafing about on the north bank, men who were probably intent on a little sniping; but they were all. And the general came to the conclusion that his spies were right for once, that the whole force of the enemy was awaiting him at Spytfontein, and that he would "not meet with any determined resistance on the Modder." He therefore determined to cross next morning (November 28th), and plans were made to leave one battalion (the Northamptons), 300 Engineers, the Naval Brigade, and three guns at Modder River to guard that end of the railway, while the rest of the force pushed over the stream, preparatory to setting out the following day (November 29th) for Spytfontein, *viâ* Jacobsdal in the Free State.

But various circumstances soon made the general revise his plans. Early in the morning of the 28th, a native came in to say that Modder River village and the northern bank of the river were strongly held by a large force and many guns. Instantly an attack was resolved upon, for the river must be crossed.

In order to understand the battle, you must know that near the point where the

railway bridge was hanging, more than half shattered, across the Modder, another stream, the Riet, adds its tribute to the Modder's waters. The Modder, at the point of junction, runs almost from north to south, the Riet from the south-east to north-west ; and, after joining, their combined flood flows for a short distance from east to west, and then turns to the south again.

A direct frontal attack would mean crossing by the main road drift a little above the railway bridge, while any attack on the right would mean that the force would be obliged to ford the Riet first, then march across the intervening tongue of land, and then ford the Modder. In any case, the force could be raked from both flanks.

The camp was left at about 4 a.m., the cavalry and mounted infantry going first, the infantry being ordered to follow with the guns. Not knowing how strong the enemy was, Lord Methuen had ordered the infantry to be spread out very wide—with a good space between the brigades and the men in extended order. There was to be artillery fire directed to the banks where the native had reported the enemy to be, and then a general infantry advance along the whole line, a short rifle duel, a dash through the water, and then the bayonet. Now it is a curious thing that the Intelligence Department reported to Lord Methuen that both the Riet and the Modder were fordable anywhere. The whole plan of attack was based upon this, as you can see ; for it would be madness to rush a long line of infantry at a river unfordable, or only fordable in places. Anyhow, it was thought, there were only a few Boers, and it would not be much of an affair. Little did my Lord Methuen, or any other man on the British side, imagine that ere the day was done nearly 500 of the force would be lying helpless on the field.

The battalions deployed for the attack in this order (beginning on the left) : half battalion North Lancashires, Yorkshire Light Infantry, Northumberland Fusiliers (centre of position), 2nd Coldstreams, Grenadier Guards, Scots Guards, 1st Coldstreams, cavalry, and Rimington's Scouts in reserve. The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders were on the left-centre, behind the Yorkshires and the Fighting Fifth ; and the artillery was on the right, right-centre, and left—the naval guns on the left-centre, in rear of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, one field battery on the outside left and rear of the Loyal North Lancashires, one just behind the Coldstreams (right-centre), and one in the rear of the Grenadiers (right).

As usual, the artillery began the battle, throwing shrapnel and lyddite across the River Modder and the Riet ; and the Boers answered occasionally and lazily. It seemed as though the reports of our Intelligence people were right, and that the position was not strongly held. The infantry, having marched some five miles from Klokfontein, now came up and advanced at a walk, in open order and with their usual steadiness, over the perfectly flat and open ground towards the river. "Up, there, on the left!" "Back a little on the right!" and the brigades stepped out fearlessly, boldly, incautiously, keeping formation as if on parade. The Modder is only 1,200 yards away. There are a few of the Boers, galloping on ponies on the other side—about fifty, not more. One or two shots have been fired at long range from the northern river bank. Probably they are making off, the last few of them. to Spytfontein.

"Up, there, on the left!" "Up in the centre!" "Back a little on the ——! My God!" The ejaculation bursts forth as, with a suddenness the more surprising from the deserted look of the position, the banks of the Modder, the banks of the Riet, blaze with one terrific fusillade of riflery. It seems like a never-ending hail. Down go Scots and Coldstreams, Grenadiers and Lancashires, Northumberlands and Yorkshires. The Guards' Brigade suffers the most severely at the first discharge; and if you look at the map on p. 249 you will see why.

It does not require very much knowledge of military matters to appreciate the beauty of the Boer positions from a defensive standpoint. Neither does it need explanation, or cause surprise, when one hears that the Coldstreams and Scots Guards, receiving a terrible, sudden and simultaneous fire, at comparatively close range, from the Boer trenches on the banks of the Riet, were instantly checked in their advance.

On the other wing the Boers also waited until the Lancashires and Yorkshiremen and Northumbrians were within about 1,200 yards; and then they, too, from perfect shelter poured in a fire that swept the open ground like a blizzard. To stand up to such a fusillade would have been impossible; and our men did the only thing they could do—threw themselves flat on the earth and opened fire with their rifles. Then the big gun on the left of the railway threw its huge shells at them; and the Boer 15-pounders dropped shrapnel; and from the entrenchments on the other side of the Riet Maxim guns showered streams of bullets upon our devoted infantry.

Once more we had been tricked by the simple farmers. While our heavy guns were cannonading their positions early in the morning, the Dutchmen were lying hid in perfectly-constructed trenches—almost like caves; and when our artillery fire slackened, and they knew our infantry to be advancing, they settled themselves cautiously behind earthworks and boulders, waited until our men were within comfortable range, and then "let go" for all they were worth. From the accounts of some of them who fell into our hands, it appeared that the guileless, innocent way in which we walked into traps used to cause much amusement to the burghers. "We could always tell what you were going to do," remarked a prisoner. "You would bombard our trenches for a time—anything from a couple of hours to a couple of days. Then your soldiers would march straight at us. It was very brave; but *verdomd* foolish. For while your shells were bursting in our advanced trenches, we were not there. We were some distance in the rear, well concealed in other trenches where shells could not hurt us. When your artillery fire slackened, we just went into the front trenches, waited until you were pretty close, and then shot you down." In short, these civilian warriors laughed consumedly at the tactics displayed by the British leaders early in the war. One day they were to meet a man as clever as they; but not yet.

At Modder River they set a booby-trap for us; and we fell into it. It is doubtful whether Lord Methuen was justified in attempting the passage of Modder River at this point without careful scouting. And his scouting ought to have extended not merely straight ahead to the village (which was done in a perfunctory sort of way), but also to the banks of the Riet, whence he could be enfiladed by the enemy on his march to the Drift. Lord

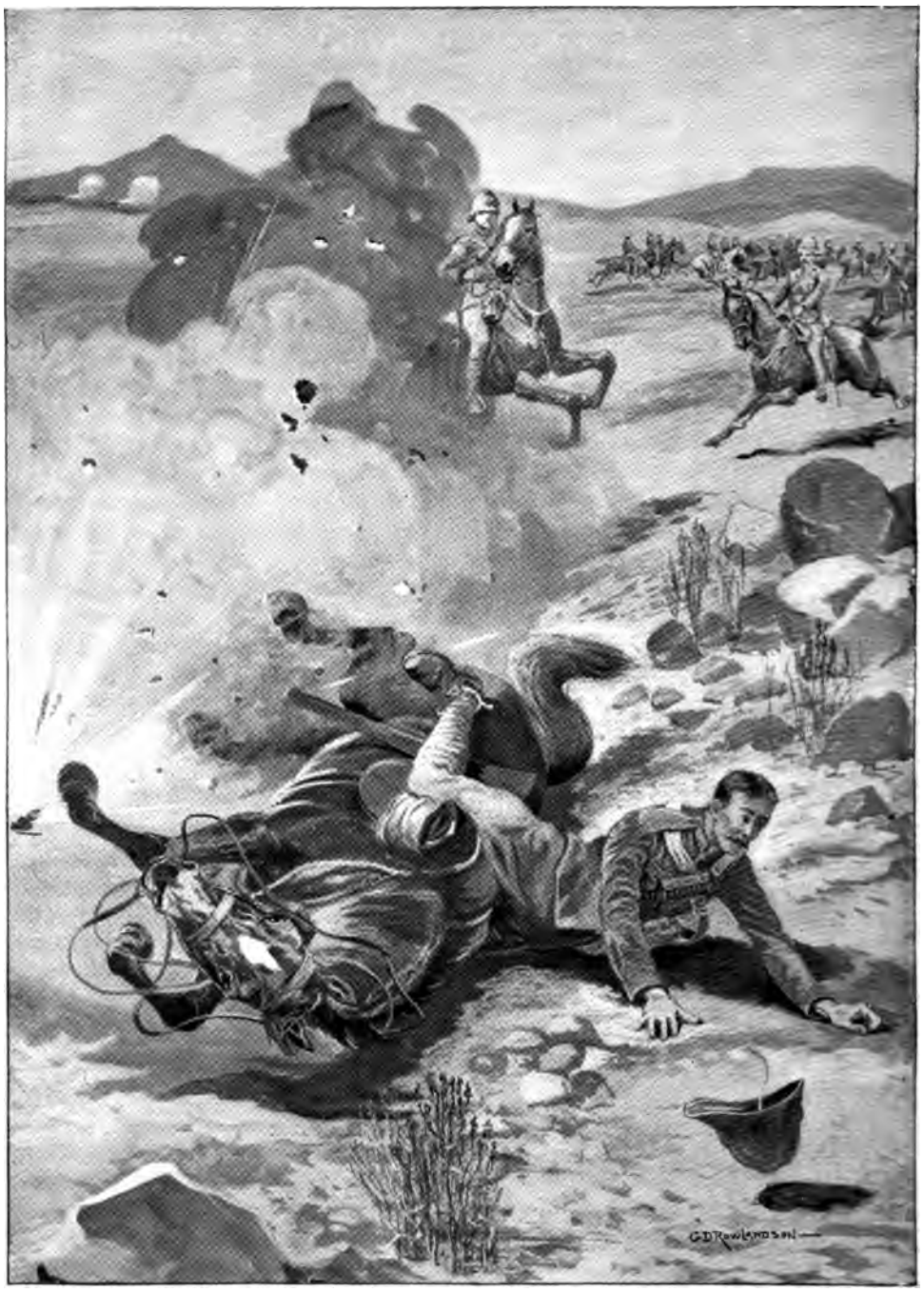
Methuen had not scouted as he might have done, "so there's an end on't"; and let us pass to what did happen.

When that terrible and unexpected fusillade broke out from such close quarters, the British infantry did the only thing possible—every man threw himself on the ground. The Scots Guards, on the right, came in for a discharge of exceptional severity, for the Boers had trained well on them a 1-pound Maxim-Nordenfeldt, throwing small shells with inconceivable rapidity. The Scots had a small ·303 Maxim of the ordinary kind, and this made a plucky attempt to reply. But the Scots' Maxim was in the open, the Boer gun under cover; and the contest was too unequal to last. Still, the Guardsmen held to it, being much encouraged by their dauntless young commander, Lieutenant Elwes; and continued to work their gun until every one of the Maxim detachment was either killed or wounded. Then the battalion withdrew to the cover of an old dam, and thence opened a hot musketry fire.

Our naval guns had come up by train; and turned out in no time. Not before they were wanted. For, along with the simultaneous musketry fire, all the Boers' big guns had opened on our troops. As soon as the enemy saw our big fellows, they tried to put them out of action; and one, two, three shells came sailing over the Modder from their artillery by the side of the railway. The first dropped just in front of the naval battery; the second just over it. "They'll hit us next time," said Jack, as he threw off his jacket and cleared for action. But they did not. The third shell fell well to one side. All the same, it was near enough to be unpleasant; and it became time for the lads in blue to bestir themselves. First, it was necessary to find the range; for the naval man is a person of economy, and hates to waste a shot. The range being calculated, and the distance given, the ships' guns opened fire; and dropped shell after shell round and amongst the Boer guns.

The noise was deafening now. Every gun, every rifle on both sides was being fired as fast as it could be loaded; and the sound of the bullets and shells was a thing to be remembered. Steadily and continuously, for hour after hour it went on. It seemed quite impossible for anybody to cross the water under such a fire. Old campaigners said that in all their experience they had seen nothing like it, nor did they think anything approaching this terrible musketry had ever been seen in the world. Still the British infantry, crawling along on the hot brown earth, advanced towards the river. Every man fired as he advanced; and the advance was terribly slow.

The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders found their kilts less convenient than the plain, khaki-coloured cotton-drill trousers of the other battalions. They had to lie down quite flat for hours. All through the morning, through the blazing noontide, through the scorching afternoon they lay; and at the end of it scores were lame—for the sun-rays, descending on the uncovered backs of the knees, blistered and burned the skin until most of the braw kilties looked as if their legs had been sandpapered. Long, long may kilt and tartan flourish! Many of the proudest recollections of the British race are associated with Highland regiments shoulder to shoulder. Still, when all is said and done, the kilt has many disadvantages as a fighting dress; and in this case the wearers of it were for days incapacitated. Yet if, after the day was over, you had asked one of those



A MARVELLOUS ESCAPE.

suffering wretches who was trying to ease his pain whether or no he would be willing to fight in trousers, he would have said something like this: "Hoots! Toots! mon; ye're bletherin'!" If, indeed, he had not supposed you to be a wandering lunatic.

After lying for five hours on their bellies, the Highlanders began to get restless. "This is hell!" remarked Mac-somebody, as he filled his magazine again. And well might he say so, on the supposition that the place he mentioned is one of heat and of torment. The sun had taken all the skin off the back of his legs from the top of the calf to just above the knee, and the fierce rays added momentarily to the torture. There was not a drop of water to be had. Shells and bullets tore up the ground and hit him with dust, if with nothing worse. Even the very rifle he held was almost red-hot with continuous firing.

And the Highlanders that day, as on others, suffered severely, being especially made a target by the enemy's riflemen. True, they were not right in the front; but they were in full view of the foe, by reason of the ground sloping down to the river. Again, the dark tartan showed up on the brown earth, offering a more distinct mark than the khaki of the battalions less showily dressed. And so again, as at Elandslaagte, the proud Highlander had to pay for his pride. Lord Methuen had made them don a sort of apron made of khaki; but these lady-like garments flapped up to such an extent as to be of but little practical use.

But your Scot is a stoical personage. No one ever accused him of not being able to take punishment like a man; and so, when the gentleman in the ranks uttered the speech I have quoted, his comrade on the right shouted back: "Ay! but we maun juist thole it." And thole it they did, like men. For sixteen mortal hours they tholed it—frizzled and burned and shot; hungry (for they had practically fasted since the day before) and, above all, thirsty; choked and blinded with flying dust. They "juist tholed it." And would have "juist tholed it" had it lasted twenty-six hours instead of sixteen. But they hoped and prayed for a charge with the steel at the finish. This was their first battle of the war; and the kilted lads were burning to show what Scottish valour could do. But it seemed a long time to wait for the "Fix bayonets!"

It was about eight o'clock when battle was really joined; and a giant's game of long bowls was going on between our naval guns and the Boer heavy artillery near the railway for three and a half hours after this. The Dutchman had concealed his pieces with great skill; and it took Jack, with all his great talents, an hour or more to find the positions of those guns. But when Jack did find them, he fastened on them like the grimmest kind of grim death.

You have heard or read possibly of those fancy revolver-shots in America who can fire at a board on which is a row of six tin-tacks, and drive in the whole row so quickly that it all seems like one crackling shot. In the same way the naval gunnery brigade made things lively for the opposition. They threw lyddite round him, and over him, and on him until his fire grew slacker and slacker. It was obvious that the Boer gunners were either becoming fewer, or else were reluctant to man their guns.

This was the signal for Jack to pump lyddite across at them faster than ever—and he could throw ten shells per gun per minute when he really set him-

self to do a bit of fancy shooting. At last, about half an hour before noon, two of the great guns on the north of the Modder were silenced. Nobody knew whether they had been disabled or not. One man said afterwards that he saw the gun, men and all, go sky-high ; but it is to be feared that the gentleman in khaki was plying that ancestral weapon—the long-bow.

Having reduced the artillery fire somewhat, the sailors turned their attention to the riflemen in the trenches, on the kopjes, and in the farm and village. The practice was marvellous. The great weapons swivelled round with ease—as easily as one could point with the finger. It rained lyddite on the village, on the kopjes to the left, on the trenches by the Riet. An officer espied a party of Boers with waggons moving in the open at the back of their position. A quick order—one, two, three shells—the first over them, the second behind them, the third plump into them. It took twelve seconds in all ; and when the dust had cleared away, Boers and waggons had disappeared. And now, the outranging Boer guns being silenced, the field batteries began to play their part. One of them (the 76th F.B.) dashed up in front of the 3rd and 2nd Coldstreams in daring style ; and, though opened upon by the enemy's rifles, kept up a tremendous fire of shrapnel on the trenches.

The battle now stood thus. The enemy's big guns—or, rather, the most dangerous of them—silenced by the naval men. The Argyll and Sutherlands on the left centre and the 3rd Grenadiers and 2nd Coldstreams lying down—having crawled some considerable distance to within about 1,000 yards of the foe—pouring in a terrific rifle-fire on the front. The Scots Guards, part in an old reservoir, part in some scrub near the river, also emptying their magazines as fast as they could load them. The 1st Coldstreams having pushed up when the Scots retired to the reservoir, lying down close to the bank of the Riet, and also blazing away.

On the other side of the field, Lancashires and Yorkshires and Northumberlands, the most dogged of all people in England, were pressing on and on to the bank of the Modder, swearing to cross and to kill every Boer they could find. The 9th Brigade, which was composed of these battalions and the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, had a fearful task before them. The Boers were lining both banks of the river, they covered our advance from kopjes, and had also some farmhouse buildings and the village as cover. There was another very serious matter—the brigade had advanced well into the horse-shoe formed by the rivers ere they knew of the presence of the enemy in force. They discovered that presence only when they had advanced too far, for the fire which broke out all along the Boer position reached far outside our left. (See sketch plan.) In other words, the Boers were not only on the front and left flank of the 9th Brigade, but also slightly on the left rear.

Colonel Pole-Carew was leading the 9th Brigade, and he speedily repaired the error. He turned the whole Brigade almost half round to the left, and pushed his left up. The two and a half battalions—the 5th, the Yorkshire Light Infantry and the Loyal North Lancashires—fought magnificently. Indeed it was the 9th Brigade that saved the day. It took them four hours of steady, dogged, give-and-take fighting to reach the river. All these troops had been under fire before ; they were all

seasoned, too, to the tropical climates. They all hailed from counties where there is great local pride and patriotism; and a Lancashire man will fight all the better when a Tyke is looking on, and a Yorkshireman when he knows he is under the eye of a Lancastrian. He wants to show these other beggars how to do it. As for your Northumbrian, he fights, to a great extent, because he likes it. One does not descend from generations of moss-troopers for nought.

The fire from the kopjes, the village, and the trenches was severe enough in all conscience. How much the more when the bullets whizzed from three sides at once. A heavy fire from the front can be borne even when, as here, it is unexpected. An enfilading fire from the flank is trying, because it is so deadly; but it can be borne. But a fire from three quarters—it takes a battalion of heroes, men without nerves, men of supreme steadfastness, to bear that without breaking. Yet these three stood it; nor wavered nor faltered.

So far from being intimidated by the cross fire, the men seemed to be merely exasperated. Pole-Carew edged them out to the left, and in a widespread line, six paces between the files, they made for the river bank. At first they had no artillery on this side, and for some ninety minutes had to reply with rifles only to the shells and bullets of the enemy, until the 62nd Field Battery, marching straight from Belmont, trotted up (see p. 249) and, without a moment's delay, opened with shrapnel and steadied down the Boer fire. Then the 9th Brigade advanced, with the kilties crawling behind them, the Yorkshires, the Lancashires, and the Northumberlands advancing towards the Modder on the left, and the Highlanders pressing on towards the bridge.

GENERAL POLE-CAREW
(*Photo: Gregory, London.*)

From eight o'clock until eleven the advance continued. It was no good waiting for the Boer rifle-fire to slacken; it never slackened for one single moment. A never-ending sort of fire it was, like a machine endowed with perpetual motion. But the 62nd Battery brought some relief to the infantry by taming the Boer big guns. And not before it was time. The German gunners had the range, and were dropping shell after shell into the Northumberlands. One man of that regiment, a sergeant named Pagett, had a weird experience. He was marching with his company towards the river when a shell came whistling within an inch of his head.

Round and round he whirled until at last, with a heartrending shriek, he fell in a heap to the ground. "Poor old Pagett!" his comrades said, and passed on. But the sergeant was not by any means done with yet. It was simply the wind of the shell that had sent him spinning. In half an hour he had come to; and, finding his own regiment had retired, he simply fell in with the nearest, which happened to be the Highlanders, and with them he remained all day, the only bifurcated-garment-clad person in the ranks. His messmates got a terrible fright when he turned up again that night, for he had been reported dead.

Now occurred a terrible misfortune. By eleven a.m. the 9th Brigade had, by its magnificent courage and the splendid handling of its officers, reached the bank of the Modder, which is here about the width of the Ouse at York. Now it had been reported, and Methuen believed, that the Modder and the Riet were fordable anywhere. The report was a lie, invented, no doubt, to draw our troops on. So far from the rivers being fordable anywhere, they were both of considerable depth, being only fordable by wading in about two places within two miles of the railway bridge. What these men who had slowly fought their way up to the banks, believing that they could wade through practically in line—what they thought and said is better left unwritten. But they did not spend their time in useless maledictions; they set about at once to discover a fordable spot.

Now the Modder River at this point was a favourite summer excursion resort for the Kimberley folk, a kind of Maidenhead or Marlow; and at a point some two miles east of the railway a dam had been constructed, to the end that the waters of the Modder might always be full enough for pleasant boating. This dam, with its weir, was pretty full at the time, the water rushing swiftly over the weir like some miniature Niagara.

Luckily Pole-Carew had with him some of Rimington's Guides, enterprising fellows, and as brave as enterprising, and these prowled down the stream to look for a crossing. They found the weir I have mentioned, and at noon ten of them crossed by it, holding on to the iron palings and struggling through the rushing water. It was not easy, but they did it; and another of their number went back to tell the brigadier what his comrades had accomplished. Then Pole-Carew lined the banks of the river with his rifles, and sent off a few odd companies to cross by the dam and weir.

It was a sight to see—four hundred men clambering singly over at this perilous passage. The waters roared beneath. They were up to the middle in a rushing torrent. Bullets whistled past them. But they held on their way, and soon the whole four hundred were safely over. This was more like business! There would be some cold-steel work, then, after all; and the North Lancashires, the first to cross after the ten Guides, began to think that ere another week their long-separated companies would be reunited. The four hundred formed up in a long, wide line, and began to advance along the north bank. Here are some kopjes. Advance, lads! but cautiously. Now for it. "Fix bayonets," and the ready steel leaps from the scabbard. "Here, bugler, the charge!" As the well-known, welcome notes burst brazen on the air there is a yell! A shout! And with one furious, irresistible rush the British infantry line rolls over the slope of the low kopjes, rolls over them

like a muddy sea wave, until with a mighty roar the crest is reached.

There is some bloody work for a few terrible moments. The North Lancashires shout as they drive in the steel. A fair-haired private, first in with the bayonet, is shot in innumerable places, but most of the Boers, seeing that dread steel-pointed line advancing upon them, bolted ere the shock came, and are now but mounted specks in the distance.

Now Pole-Carew takes almost the whole of his brigade across the stream, to be followed, much later in the afternoon, by some Engineers, lugging two great guns.

This movement of Carew's on the left was the turning-point in the battle. In the other parts of the field our men cou'd make practically no progress. There were the Guards, lying down in the sun for almost twelve hours. Occasionally an attempt was made under cover of artillery fire to advance across the Riet, and one company under Captain Heneage lost four sergeants in such an attempt. To say that the Guards suffered that day is to use language inadequate and weak. They had to bear not only the fire of the enemy but the heat of the blazing sun, and, in addition, the torture of a parching thirst. The men had filled their water-bottles at Klokfontein in the early morning, but this slight supply was soon exhausted; and they began to suffer the agonies of Dives in torment.

One of them, a serious-minded man, who went through that awful day unscathed, though his equipment was three times hit, declared that never before had he fully realised the pathos of that part of the Gospel parable where the rich man, being in torment, lifted up his eyes, and, beholding Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, asked that the favoured one might "dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue." A strong man can bear hunger, but long abstinence from water in such a country as South Africa is calculated to produce madness.

There were, in the rear of the battalions, water-carts, like huge barrels on wheels, but to reach these one must cross a zone of fire without a vestige of cover. And it was impossible to bring the carts nearer, because the mules would have been shot down on the instant. But there were brave men in the infantry line willing to risk life and limb for their comrades' sake; and these, collecting all the water-bottles they could carry, crawled and ran to the rear and made for the water-carts. They were under fire every foot of the distance, and more than one dropped. But those who could—even some of those wounded—struggled on and filled their vessels with the precious fluid. Then they started back to the firing-line. Again the enemy broke out in a streak of flame. It was a case of running the gauntlet, of facing a horizontal hailstorm of bullets. Yet the heroes struggled on undaunted, though many a one dropped by the way. A few reached the firing-line with their precious burdens. One man seemed to have only eluded the hand of black death by hairbreadths, for of the two dozen water-bottles that he carried, several had been pierced by Mauser bullets, the man himself being unhurt.

It is in actions like these by which the true heroism of the man and the soldier is shown. It is no great matter to storm an entrenchment when comrades are by your side, when officers lead the way. But it augurs courage and devotion of the highest order to cross a fire-swept plain twice to procure for your comrades a little drop of water to cool the tongue.

One of the circumstances which made

this battle so difficult for our army was the difficulty, almost amounting to impossibility, of sending orders from the general commanding the column to the various brigade and regimental commanders. The gallopers of the Staff, in order to reach the persons to whom messages were sent, had to cross the plain—targets for a thousand rifles. One officer of the Staff was shot dead as he sat on horseback beside Lord Methuen, and soon all the "gallopers" had to make the passage of the deadly zone on foot.

About one o'clock Lord Methuen was wounded by a bullet ; and, though he continued to direct the fight in part, Sir Henry Colville, of the Guards' Brigade, took over the command of the column.

All the afternoon, as all the long morning, the Guards lay down, pouring round after round into the trenches on the Riet. They tried to get nearer to the bank, but there was no cover, and the fire was too hot and too continuous. Then the 75th Field Battery limbered up and advanced to within 1,500 yards of the Boer riflemen. "Unlimber!" But ere this could be done —and it only takes ten seconds with a smart battery—half a dozen horses rolled over. "Now we'll make 'em sit up!" observed a gunner ; and, in truth, it seemed like it. With inconceivable rapidity the six guns loaded and fired, loaded and fired, until the noise became like a long roll of thunder rather than a mere succession of reports.

The shrapnel, well aimed and with well-fused shells, did for a moment cause the riflemen in the trenches some consternation and a little loss ; but in another moment they recovered themselves, and two hundred rifles, aimed and sighted by quick eyes, held by steady hands, sent showers of Mauser bullets whistling round guns and gunners. Our men began to drop—to drop fast ; and it soon became apparent that the battery could not hold its position. "Limber up!" The horses dash up with the limbers. The fusillade from the river becomes more furious. It becomes a serious question whether the guns can be retired at all. Five-and-twenty horses lie on the plain, some of them with twenty and more bullets in them. The drivers suffer too. One, shot through the lungs, still urges on his wounded steed. The officers jump from their chargers. "Here! Harness these to the limbers." With the haste of dire peril, with the steadiness of discipline, at last a few horses are ready, just enough to draw all the guns.

Gallop! Spare not whip or spur. The battery is in motion, flying to the rear; many of its men, most of its horses, streaming red. And at last, when out of close range of those deadly rifles, the guns once more unlimber, the man with the hole in his chest drops off a thrice-wounded horse. "Close shave!" he murmurs, and knows no more for many a day.

From dawn to dusk the Guards' Brigade did little but lie down and fire at an invisible foe. Yet once or twice they tried to break through the wall of fire and cross the stream dividing their bayonets from the breast of the enemy. The advance, chiefly accomplished by wriggling on the ground, brought the brigade to within about 800 yards of the entrenchments before sunset. And one little party of Coldstreams struggled to the banks of the stream, and, after many attempts, found a place where they could cross, partly by wading, partly by swimming. A hot fire met them ; but twenty-four men accomplished the passage of the Riet, and tried to make a stand there. Others did

THE DASH ACROSS THE MODDER RIVER.

their best to follow them ; but the enemy brought more rifles and a 1-pounder Maxim to bear on the ford, and not another man could live through it. Had the Riet been, as Lord Methuen believed, fordable anywhere, the Guards would now have won the passage, and the battle would soon have been over. But the information was entirely misleading ; and our men being obliged to cross at this single spot, the Boers were able to command the Drift with ease.

The enemy also turned their attention to the bold two dozen who stood on their side of the river ; and these, their ammunition nearly exhausted, were unable to hold the place they had so gallantly gained, and retired after a vain and ineffectual struggle.

Our hopes centred now on the left wing—Pole-Carew's 9th Brigade. The whole of that bloody afternoon the few battalions of that fine force pushed their way along the river bank. Here they rushed a kopje at the point of the bayonet. There they struggled gamely on, cautiously, persistently, to the next point held by the Boers. A farmhouse this time, whence issue hundreds of bullets from scores of rifles. An officer jumps forward. "Who's with me?" And a gallant band with bayonets fixed springs after him. The rest throw lead at the house, while the storming party, creeping to the last bit of cover, takes breath for a rush. "Now, boys!" Then the Tykes tear madly for the building. Here is a door—loopholed, and Mauser muzzles peeping through the holes. Down it goes. Smash! And with the butt-end of their rifles the Yorkshire Light Infantry smash the thick wood to splinters. "Into them, boys!" "Give them cold Sheffield!" Boers die on the stairs, and in the kitchen, and in the great parlour where last night they assembled to read the Bible and offer up a prayer to the God of battles that he would deliver these Philistines into their hand.

Some jump out of windows and off the roof. Very few get away ; for the rifles outside are on the watch, and ragged, uncouth men drop bleeding.

Now for another rush. Clear this trench. Groans go up from the Northumberlands, for the trench is empty when they get there. And so they drive the enemy before them up the bank, fighting all the way ; but he never, or very seldom, waits for the terrible final rush. The village at last is reached. Here is a house full of them—a regular fortress. Out of the way, you others! The Highlanders are to the fore! Pouring in a deadly volley, the Scotsmen rush to the onslaught. They break the doors, they climb to the roof, tear off the thatch, and drop on the heads of the burghers. No Highlander now knows pain or fatigue. He knows but one thing : that no single Boer shall leave the place alive. The burghers seem paralysed. They dread these fierce men-women (so the Kaffirs call them), these giants who fight like devils, who snarl as they thrust in the bayonet, and who never thrust but once. They shriek and call upon Jehovah. But not for long ; for soon a silence falls upon that house, a silence full of meaning, broken only now and then by the moan of one whose life is ebbing from him drop by drop.

And the Highland men, all the old warrior blood fired by the taste of carnage, issue forth from the killing-place with fiery eye and head erect.

On they go, clearing house after house, until at last, having cleared the west of the village, they find themselves barred by artillery and strong fortifications. It is

now late in the day. For twelve hours these troops have been on their feet—or, worse still, lying down—a target all the time. There is no help for it but to hold the ground won, and resume the clearing-out process in the morning. So until 7 p.m. they take cover, and exchange bullets with the enemy; and then darkness—complete darkness—sets in and shuts out the foe from their sight.

But the enemy had had enough of it. Seeing that part of the 9th Brigade had crossed the Modder—to be reinforced, probably, by other troops ere long—he has already begun to retire. Some of his men and guns went off as early as 5.30 p.m. And with the darkness the main body steals away, leaving two heavy guns behind. They think the British are sure to make a night attack, and they fear the issue. They are right in their judgment of the tactics to be pursued by the attacking force; for a night attack was, in fact, determined upon by Sir H. Colville, and the word was sent round to make ready.

But two things intervene. First comes the news that the 9th Brigade has crossed the Modder, and is holding a strong position favourable for attack the next day. Second, the men are dog-tired, and positively faint with hunger. A battle of this length, where it is impossible to send food to the firing line, exhausts the men terribly; and to the other factors must be added the awful heat of the day.

Wherefore plans are altered. The Guards shall cross in the morning by the same way that the 9th Brigade crossed. So the men lie on the ground they have held so long, the field wet with the blood of their comrades. And they eat greedily of the biscuit served out to them — no very substantial fare after twenty hours of fasting, especially to a man accustomed to British beef. That night they sleep out in the open, in a night as cold as the day was hot. They sleep with their arms by their sides, with the dust and sweat of battle caked upon them.

And when at early dawn they are awakened, and the Guards' Brigade is bidden to cross the Modder on the left, and the 9th Brigade moves forward, and the gunners train their weapons on the entrenchments, they find—nothing! The Boers have vanished in the night. They have even, with incredible coolness, returned and carried away the two big guns at first abandoned. And the British force is like a lion robbed of its prey. The men had hoped to come to grips with these sharpshooters; to make them feel the weight of their vengeance; to make them pay for the weary hours of yesterday.

But the Boers knew better. It was no part of their policy to try to hold a position once it had ceased to be easily tenable. To inflict as much loss as possible; then to bolt out of harm's way—that was their notion of strategy. And a terribly costly system it was, for us. In this fight we had lost seventy men and officers killed on the field. The wounded numbered twenty officers, all of whom afterwards recovered; and 393 men, of whom only thirty-one died afterwards of their wounds. Two men were missing, or prisoners, making in all a casualty list of 485. It was a heavy price to pay for the victory—a victory which meant so little, since we neither crippled the enemy, nor captured any guns, nor took many prisoners. The Boer losses were unknown, as they carried off their wounded and buried most of their dead either in the earth or the river. Over a hundred corpses were picked up out of the Riet and the Modder; and these were probably not all the losses.

The victory was indeed to the British arms, and never did soldiers better deserve the laurel wreath. But the result was such as to cause serious misgivings in the minds of Englishmen. The Briton could not help thinking that there must be some way of fighting these marksmen other than that of hurling our plucky infantry straight on the muzzles of their rifles, of attacking them otherwise than by attempting to ford unfordable rivers. In fact, from the day of the battle of Modder River, the policy of the frontal attack, long ere this declared by experts to be wasteful, began to appear murderous and dangerous.

You may have the grandest infantry in the world, but why should it be expended in continually attempting the impossible? This was a question soon to be asked in louder tones. Even then it was being whispered abroad.

BOER FOOT-BRIDGE OVER THE TUGELA.
(Photo: B. W. Coney, Durban.)

CHAPTER XXIII.

STORMBERG.

THEY missed the turning.

That is all. But what an "all"! Moralists will tell you, preachers and teachers have for countless ages been crying aloud, that this is what has altered the fate of men and nations since the world began — they missed the turning. That simple sentence might form the text for a disquisition on failure. And in this case it was the missing of the turning that cost blood and treasure to Britain, and a reputation to the man who was misled.

"OLD BACKACHER" (AS GENERAL GATACRE IS CALLED).
(Photo: Bourne & Shepherd, Calcutta.)

On the 25th or 26th of November the Boers occupied Stormberg, where there is a railway station known as Stormberg Junction. The place itself was one of strength. There was a ridge of considerable height running along on the west of the village, and at the back of the railway station a mountain known as Rooi Kop—in English, the Red Mountain. Half a battalion of the Berkshires had been at Stormberg; and they had seized these positions and fortified them, constructing entrenchments both parallel and at right angles. Now these trenches were in the hands of the Dutchmen.

Gatacre had a very difficult task in hand. He had 250 miles of rail to guard, an enormous district of disaffected to police, and there was a chance that any day the Dutch colonists would rise *en masse* and join the enemy. The general was supposed to have a division under his command, but, in fact, he never had more than three battalions of infantry and hardly any mounted troops.

Stormberg was not the place at which General Gatacre desired to see the foe. Not only was the position, as a defensive position, a good one, but Stormberg was the junction whence both rail and telegraph wires branched off to the west, where French was. The possession of the railway at this point meant, in fact, the cutting off of Gatacre from French; and it reduced their divisions to two separate and distinct bodies. If they could have kept communication across country by rail they might easily have co-operated, and, in fact, have joined forces for a big movement at any time.

It is easily seen, therefore, that Stormberg was a place of some importance in the campaign. Wherefore General Gatacre resolved to make a bold bid for it. And, let it be said, in this he was doubtless right.

The men had been kept at Queenstown for four or five days digging and fortifying,

until, on Wednesday, the 22nd of November, they received the order to move on to Putter's Kraal, a village further up the line. It should here be said that the day before a reconnaissance had been made up the line as far as Molteno, a township only about eight miles from Stormberg by the direct route. It is possible that on that date a small but determined force might have pushed on and occupied Stormberg itself; for the main body of the enemy had not, at that time, taken possession of it. As has been said, the next day the army entrained and moved to Putter's Kraal, some twenty miles further north than Queenstown. It was not the general's intention, however, to sit there. There was more digging of ditches and throwing up of earthworks; and on the 28th a battalion of infantry and some Mounted Rifles took possession of Bushman's Hoek, having, three days previously, seized on Sterkstrom, a point about twelve miles further north on the railway line. But he kept his headquarters at Putter's Kraal.

The restless general kept his men actively employed — manœuvring, skirmishing, shooting, marching. Everything and anything to keep them fit and well for the work in hand. It was at first resolved to make the great move on the 8th of December; and plans were made to run the troops up to Molteno by rail that evening, march them on Stormberg the same night, and attack at daybreak the next morning (Saturday, the 9th December). But that was found inadvisable, and the idea was abandoned in favour of a start from Putter's Kraal on the morning of the 9th, thence by rail to Molteno—a few hours' rest there; and then a march to Stormberg at night and an attack at dawn on Sunday morning (10th).

Gatacre at that time had only about half his division, and he was not, therefore, able to make an attack in overwhelming force. He could only trust to surprise the enemy by the suddenness of his spring, and leave the bayonet to do the rest. He did not wait for the rest of his force to come from Cape Town because he thought delay to be too dangerous. The rebel Cape Dutch were joining the invaders in large numbers; and something must be done to stop this—nothing like defeating an enemy if you want to decrease the number of his adherents. Then, again, from a military point of view, it seemed advisable to clear the foe out of that important railway junction.

So a selection was made of the force to attack Stormberg. Two mixed battalions of infantry, neither of them at full war strength, two batteries of Field Artillery, the 74th and 77th, and some "details"—that is, some Royal Engineers, Army Service Corps men, Medical Corps, and so forth. The infantry was composed of men of the 2nd Battalion Royal Irish Rifles, and the 2nd Northumberland Fusiliers. And there were, besides, of mounted troops a few—no cavalry proper, but a section of Mounted Infantry of the 2nd Royal Berkshire Regiment and a few of the Cape Mounted Police. It should be said that the Cape Mounted Police were amongst the most useful and efficient of the troops in the war. They ought not to be regarded by the stay-at-home Briton as very much akin to the police of Great Britain. They are a semi-military force, armed and drilled as mounted infantry, enjoying splendid pay, and accustomed to deal with refractory bodies of natives by force of arms. A Cape Mounted Policeman spends his whole life in the saddle, and his beat is reckoned by miles where the English town policeman's is counted by yards.

Promotion is from the ranks; and the social status of the men is considerably higher than that of our "bobby." Altogether, Gatacre had about 2,500 troops of all ranks for his march out.

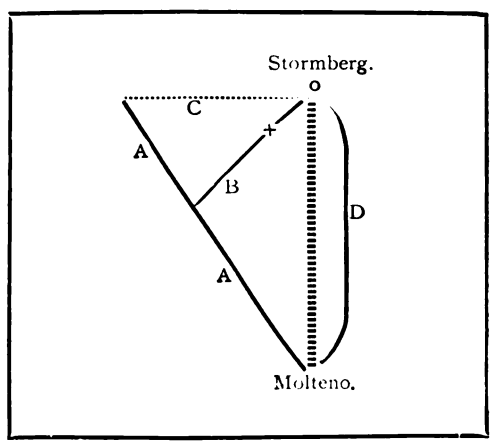
At four o'clock in the morning they were packed in railway trucks — open trucks, mind!—and they waited for a few hours like that before the train moved out. Move out they did, however, at last, and very slowly lumbered forward to Molteno. Nothing occurred on the way to break the grinding monotony of the ride. There was nothing but a blazing sun overhead and brown hills all round. And in no case would the journey have been exhilarating. It was rendered even more torturing than it might have been by the fact that the trains were late in arriving at Molteno. Not until 7 p.m. did the trains reach that little haven. The Boers, or, rather, a wandering, raiding party of them, had been in occupation here, too, but they had decamped a few days before on the arrival of some Mounted Police.

The late arrival was unfortunate, most unfortunate. You see, the men had to start the march at about 9 p.m. in order to arrive at the Boer position just after midnight. The programme was to start at 9 p.m. that (Saturday) night, make a slight detour—a march in all of some twelve miles. This would bring the column to the foot of the Boer's entrenched positions on Sunday morning at about 2 a.m. After this an hour's rest and sleep, and then to wake the Boers up at sunrise, rush their entrenchments under cover of a hail of shrapnel, and hustle them out of Stormberg before breakfast. This would be an effective blow.

At Molteno the men had some refreshments, and stretched their legs a little after the cramping confinement of the railway trucks, and a few of the old campaigners threw themselves on the ground and had forty winks. For sleep, even for a few minutes, is the best of all refreshment. Orders came that the march was to be in light order—no overcoats or haversacks; nothing but fighting gear.

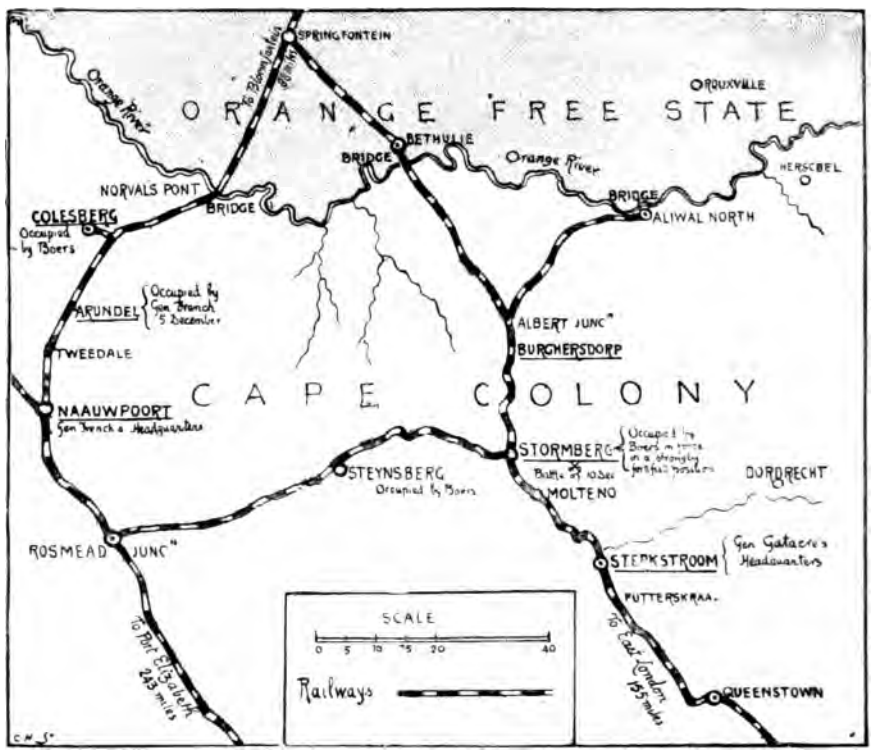
At 9 o'clock (p.m.) the column set forth, the Irish Rifles leading the way.

Now, there were two ways to Stormberg from Molteno. One was by a road leading straight to the place, running with the railway all the way. The other was by a road branching off at an angle to the left. If you wanted to get at Stormberg by this route you had to march along the road for about six miles, and then take a sharp turn to the right. The direct road would have taken Gatacre straight to the front of the Boer position. The left-hand route would land him on the enemy's right front. Let us illustrate this by a rough diagram:—



The line ▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪ is the railway. D is the direct road. The road A is the left-hand road out of Molteno, and B is the road or track turning off to the right. This

sketch does not pretend to be accurate as to scale, but it is approximately right, and will give the reader a better idea of the situation than any number of verbal explanations. Sir William Gatacre intended to march his troops along the silence. The wheels of the waggons were muffled, and the axles and bearings well greased to prevent rumbling and squeaking. Above all, no man was on any account to light a match—to do so would subject him to the doom of a traitor.



MAP OF RAILWAYS OF NORTHERN CAPE COLONY AND SOUTH ORANGE FREE STATE.

lines A and B, halt at the spot marked X about midnight, there give his men a nap for two or three hours, and be into the right of the enemy as soon as the sun began to rise.

The night was black as ink, so black that one company actually got lost, and found itself in the road D! Everything was to be done to ensure secrecy. The men were warned to preserve a dead The Field Hospital and a Maxim gun, and the reserve ammunition of the column, were left at Molteno. They were to set out later, timing themselves to arrive at X at dawn. And so at 9 o'clock the column took the road. A night march in solemn silence is a weird performance. It is impressive enough in its way, as a funeral may be impressive, but not enlivening. A route march, as every soldier knows,

is much easier to accomplish when you may talk and smoke and sing in the ranks.

The order of progress was in companies, marching by fours in column—a close formation, but necessary. For the men must "keep touch," or else all order would be gone in a moment, and you cannot set confusion right in the pitch dark and without speaking. Two guides, one a native, the other a Cape Policeman, led, with Gatacre and the Staff. Then came a few Mounted Infantry. After these the Irish Rifles. Then the two batteries, and in the rear the Northumberland Fusiliers, a hardened lot of seasoned warriors. Some who had seen them, and who pretended to speak with authority, said they were the finest regiment turned out of Aldershot for many a year. And certainly they were a most business-like lot in appearance. And they meant business too. If you happen to be called by your comrades "Fighting Fifth" you have to live up to it.

On they go, mile after mile ; and as the hours fly by and still the guides do not take the turn to the right, the general begins to be anxious. He questions the Cape Policeman. That stalwart person assures him that the turning must soon be reached. "Then," says Gatacre, "you must have seriously miscalculated the distance." At last they reach a point where the order is given "Right wheel!" and the men go past, cheerfully enough, but deadly weary. They were told that the distance was twelve miles. That they have already marched. And apparently the end of the journey is not yet. Here and there a man drops from exhaustion. The rest tramp steadily forward.

One o'clock ! Two o'clock ! Where are we? We cannot, surely, have marched past the position. Of course not. Rooi Kop is big enough to be seen, in all conscience. There is no help for it ; the men must lie down, and down they flop for half an hour, nearly every man of them falling to sleep the moment his head touches the ground. At the end of thirty minutes they are roused, and off once more. "Gawd!" one man mutters. "But old Backacher is a-givin' us a dose this go!"

Still they hope the end of their troubles will soon be seen. Alas ! brave fellows. Your trouble has not well begun !

Three o'clock ! Four ! Daylight ! And then they see what has happened. The guide has missed the turning. Instead of taking them along A and the cross-road B, he has led them another five or six miles along A and then by the next cross-road, which is indicated by the dotted line, C. This brings the column on the right flank, instead of the right front of the position to be attacked.

The blunder has been made now, whether treacherously or by design will afterwards appear. The only question is, what is to be done? It might be well to withdraw quietly and in order, and to put off the attack until another day. But Gatacre hopes against hope that he may find the enemy not quite ready to meet him, and on he goes in the dim morning light. Over kopje and veldt, until at last the sun is well above the horizon, and the men find themselves on a belt of green veldt, with a ridge on the right ; and on right front the Red Hill, the Rooi Kop they have come to take. Not a soul is to be seen, not a sound heard except the muffled tramp of our own footfalls. This is Sunday morning. The pious Dutchman does not, himself, attack on Sundays, and perhaps we have surprised him after all. The tireless general leads the way, and

the troops swing on, still in columns of fours, rifles carried anyhow, bayonets at side.

Suddenly, from the ridge on the right there comes a fearful banging, cracking, booming. The dark mountain, too, awakes, and from its sides and summit proceed a hail terrible to see, still more terrible to hear. The Irishmen, all surprised as they are, losing formation at once, do not hesitate or falter one single moment. At the double, fixing bayonets as they run—a sergeant yells, "Out with your knives, boys!"—they make for the ridge and clamber up it. The hail of bullets and shells thins them, but they struggle on. True to the traditions of the British army, their one instinct, their one desire is to get to grips with the foe and give him the cold steel. They have to cross the level ground exposed to the full fury of that devastating storm. It only makes them press on the quicker.

Some mounted infantry are with them, and these, being quicker, escape with less loss. As the horsemen put their horses at the slope, one of them—he is in a group of six—has his head swept off by a shell. The horse, frightened, gallops off into the enemy's line. Another is struck by a flying splinter, and man and horse go tumbling down. They roll, an indistinguishable mass, down the incline, right into a party ascending. Two more are knocked over, and down they go, horses and men together, over and over until they roll to the edge of a deep cleft in the hill. My God! They are over the precipice!

The infantry has spread itself out, and is coming up fast, though heeding cover too little. There is an Irish rifleman with a ghastly look. Well might he have, for his right and left hand men have both fallen within thirty seconds of each other. He himself is without a scratch. He has forgotten fatigue, forgotten hunger, forgotten everything in heaven above and in the earth beneath except one thing. Vengeance! "At them!" he yells, and rushes on.

The Northumberlands have joined in the fray, and they are trying to rush a kopje. They also have no sort of formation, no sort of order. It is a go-as-you-please. Here a man bolts ahead for a hundred yards, and is shot down. There a group, under some sergeant, or lieutenant, a corporal, or veteran private, is firing away at the summit, then rushing to the next cover higher up, then firing again.

The peculiarity of this mode of fighting is that you cannot see your enemy. You can only feel him. At last, after three-quarters of an hour of climbing, the Irishmen see ahead of them a trench full of Boers. Somebody shouts, "The steel!" And with the fearsome yell of the fighting Irishmen the bayonets rush forward. The Boers stand their ground—some of them. But in less than two minutes every single man who remained in the trench has been stretched on the earth, and bayonets have changed their colour. This puts a little heart into some of the men. They have stormed one trench. But their triumph is short-lived. The Boers have learned how to make trenches. Doubtless we have to thank some of their mercenary commanders for that. For, running zig-zag all up the ridge are other trenches commanding this one, and from these there pours a pitiless fire. There is no replying to it. It comes from both sides and from the front—from everywhere except the rear—and at all angles.

Still the infantry is not daunted. It

advances onward and upward, bent on capturing the position at all cost

The batteries, meanwhile, have not been idle. Unlimbering with all haste, they have been shelling the ridge and the Rooi Kop for half an hour. It was thought we should have a great advantage in guns, for lying Kaffirs had told us that the enemy had only one cannon. A Kaffir will tell you anything that he thinks will please you. There are some of them here now, brought to help with the transport, and they howl and shriek as the shells burst and bullets whistle around them. Plainly the Boers have many guns; but how many, and where they are, we cannot see. They are well hidden, and our gunners are firing, so to say, in the dark.

And now occurs the greatest catastrophe of the day. As the rifles swarm up the ridge, two guns shell the top, trying to pitch shells over them and demoralise the enemy's firing line. Terrible to relate, some of the missiles drop short. They are better shells than the Boers use, and they all burst; and the men who suffer are the Irish Rifles!

Gatacre is almost at his wits' end. Already 600 of his men or more have walked right into the enemy, and have been either killed or captured. There is a company of the Irish Rifles, under Lieutenant Sitwell, which distinguishes itself. The young officer keeps his head, and manages to get a party sufficiently well in hand to lead them to a ridge opposite the enemy's position. There they lie down in good order, fill their magazines, and pour in volley after volley at 1,500 yards range. The artillery, too, steadies, and blazes away at kop and ridge for all it is worth.

Something over an hour of this, and then the general gives the order to retire. The position might have been taken by the original force, but not by this reduced column. Some say that had the men not been dead beat by six-and-twenty hours of travelling and marching and duty they would, in spite of all, have taken the heights.

However that may be, the surprise has been to General Gatacre, and not to the Boers. Our boys have been on duty, almost without sleep, and with little to eat, for six and twenty hours. Now they have to march a dozen miles more under a blazing sun, and, worse still, under a heavy fire.

Sadly and with speed the force faces for home. The artillery does its best to cover the retirement, and, by pouring in shrapnel, to prevent the riflemen from getting too near. The infantry is now a mob, nothing more or less. The Boer sharpshooters line the hills and empty their rifles into the retreating column—a mass, or mob, or whatever you like to call it. Men drop by the roadside. No time to pick them up, though here and there comrades fit a blanket on four rifles and carry a wounded man. But most are left just where they fall, and there is nothing for them but death or a Boer prison.

Many are hit severely, but continue to keep up, their comrades supporting them. There is one of the Northumberlands, with his hand shot clean away; another with his back broken by a splinter of shell. Another drags along for a few yards with entrails hanging out. Then he gasps, "It's no good! Good-bye!" and dies. The poor blacks of the transport service suffer just as heavily. Here one leaps into the air and drops in a heap. A bullet has broken his spine. There is another, trying to hop home, one foot nothing but a bleeding pulp. Pelted by that

awful storm, the men stumble on. Here and there a subaltern or a sergeant collects a little force and forms a firing party ; but the only men who are really of use are the artillery.

The batteries undoubtedly save the day. They retire a little, then halt, wheel round, and sling shrapnel into the hills ; and, despite the heart-breaking nature of the task, despite the fact that they are unsupported, they intimidate the pursuers so much that they dare not come to close quarters. A gun sinks into the shifting sand. In a moment its horses are shot down, and the piece has to be abandoned. Another loses a wheel, and receives a shell on the limber. Its horses, too, are slaughtered, and it has to be left sticking there. There was no help for it. The marvel was not that our gunners lost two guns, but that they did not lose every one they took out.

May the British army be preserved from such another day ! Fancy, if you can, that mob of infantry—the transport waggons, bullocks, and mules, all mixed up with the Northumberlands and Irish Rifles ; an engineer slowly struggling through the mass, with a Fusilier on one side of him and a R.A. driver on the other. A man drops his rifle. He dare not stop to pick it up. Another drops his ; and as he stoops to pick it up (for it is disgraceful to lose one's arms), one bullet hits it on the stock, another on the magazine, and half a dozen on the muzzle ; the top is cut off. Yet that man goes through the day without a scratch. He is a reservist—one of the specials who enlist for a day, do not really serve with the colours in the ordinary way, but are called up when urgently required. This is his first experience of warfare, and it makes him feel very queer.

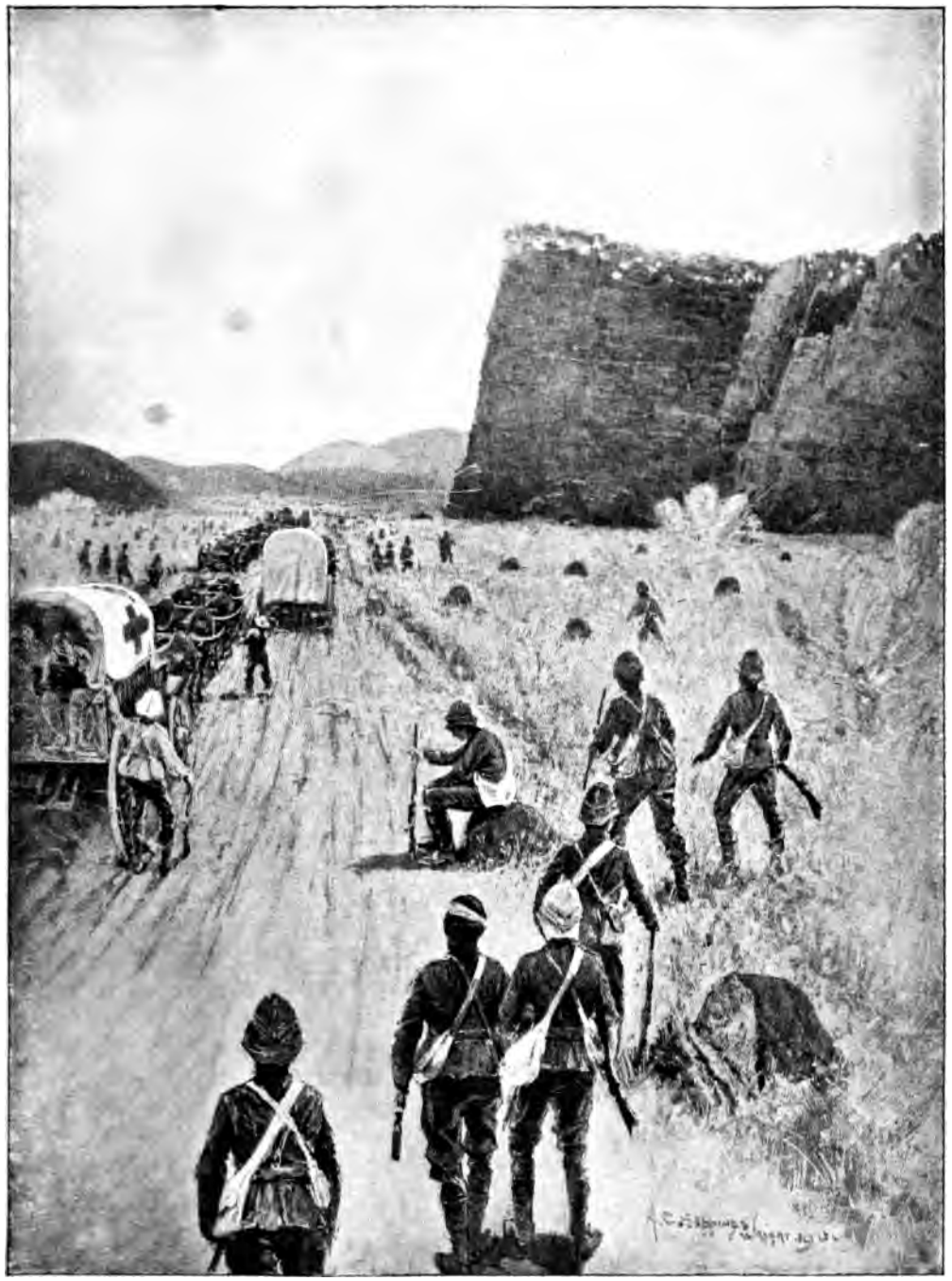
The escapes are as wonderful as the wounds are plentiful. One man is hit ten times. His helmet, his water-bottle, his bayonet are all struck ; yet he receives never a scratch.

On they go, limping slowly, for every man is tired to death. Some drop down from sheer fatigue, unable to stir another foot, and these are left behind, an easy prey. Others, when they drop because their legs will no longer support them, crawl painfully on hands and knees for miles.

Men stumble over rocks ; they break their ankles in holes ; they drop into clefts ; for they are blind with very weariness, and nothing but sheer pluck and determination makes them stumble on

A big gun—a 15-pounder, one would say—has been brought along behind the hills, and opens on the column. Every man must lie down while our batteries deal with it. Bhoom ! from the ridge. Bhoom ! from the plain. You may go on now, men. The 15-pounder has been blown sky-high by a lucky shell, and it is so near that you can see the bodies of the gunners as they go up with it. That is some little relief. Bravo ! the 77th Battery.

They struggle on thus for about twelve miles, and at last the straggling column reaches Molteno. What a sight ! How different these haggard, weary units from the smart battalions that set out last night—that set out so full of fight and of confidence. Turn the Boers out of Stormberg before daylight ! It's a God's mercy that our artillery has made some show, and frightened the Dutchmen a little, for if they had the pluck to come on they might turn us out of Molteno breakfastless. Nay, they might capture every man-jack in the place.



THE RETREAT TO MOLTENO.

The rear-guard and service men at Molteno do their best for the poor nerve-shaken wretches. They make buckets of tea and coffee. The tea turns out to be more deleterious than beneficial, and causes some little sickness.

And what a roll-call! Six hundred and thirty men or thereabouts have been left behind. Thirty-one have been killed; we have fifty-eight wounded—not a very heavy list in the circumstances, thanks be to the Royal Artillery. But the tale of missing! There are of men missing no fewer than 551. Theirs seems the hardest fate of all. For they must go to Pretoria to join the Hussars, the Irish Fusiliers, and the Gloucesters. And the sturdy men of the Fighting Fifth and the dashing boys of the Irish Rifles will be able to compare notes with their comrades who were caught at Nicholson's Nek as to the wisdom of night attacks in an unknown hilly country where every hill may prove a trap.

That day Gatacre once more shipped his men in carriages and trucks. But this time it was up, not down the line they went. The shattered, worn-out battalions were taken in melancholy procession to Sterkstroom, almost the whole way back to Putters Kraal.

It is said that General Gatacre wept as he said, "My poor men!" Well he might. Two of the finest battalions in the service had lost nearly half their numbers. The rest would be fit for nothing for many days. Two guns were lost. And, worst of all, the Boers had gained a victory of such a kind that it must improve their *morale*, while we had sustained a nerve-shaking defeat. If our men were not demoralised it was no credit to anyone but themselves, for a day more trying to the discipline of the men and the temper of the officers is hard to imagine.

And it was all through that wrong turning.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WITH METHUEN—MAGERSFONTEIN.

A DAY of wrath and disaster, of woe and wailing, of high hopes dashed, and faith destroyed. Such was December the 11th, 1899.

After crossing the river Modder on the 29th November, Lord Methuen was quite unable to carry out his original plan, which was to march with his whole division by forced marches round to the Boer left through Jacobsdal, to fall on Cronje at Spytfontein, crush him there (probably assisted in this by a sortie from Kimberley), and so relieve the Diamond City somewhere about the 3rd to the 5th of December. This plan did not allow for the obstinate resistance of the enemy at Modder River, and the consequent fatigue of the troops and the losses of men and horses. And when this resistance occurred the whole plan was upset. It became necessary to wait for reinforcements, to refresh the troops wearied by three battles in five days, and especially exhausted by the long and arduous combat at the passage of the Modder.

Lord Methuen, instead of merely bivouacking for a night, formed camp on the banks of that peaceful stream; sent for the tents and camp equipment, and soon a new white city rose, and the banks, six months before the haunt of the pleasure-seeking citizen of Kimberley, resounded with the work and play of the British soldier. The bridge over the river was repaired with extraordinary quickness by the Royal Engineers; Mr. Atkins bathed with calm enjoyment in the waters he had tried to swim in face of a murderous fire; he also played at cricket and football, and rode and ran races, and, in fact, behaved as Tommy Atkins always does behave, whether he be encamped at Aldershot or in the Punjaub, at Aberdeen or in the tropic zone. He has played at football in Cairo and under the snowclad peaks of the Hindu Kûsh; Khartoum and Buluwayo have resounded with his vociferous "Well caught, sir!" Some may affect to do in Rome as the Romans do, but the British soldier carries his own style of life, his own employments and pleasures with him all over the world.

For twelve days the 9th Brigade, the Guards and the Naval Brigade, Rimington's Guides, and all the rest of them, bathed and amused themselves, and drank in the beautiful South African air, clear and exhilarating; and tried hard to get themselves fit and well for the last march, the last onslaught that was to break the power of Cronje; and then, hey! for Kimberley. The railway bridge was soon finished and in a workable state. More men and guns arrived, fresh infantry, kilted, no less than the Highland Brigade under Wauchope. These were battalions of Gordons, of Seaforths, of Highland Light Infantry, and of that famous regiment the Black Watch. Very magnificent they looked, as they swung into camp, pipers strutting before them, kilts swish-swishing, all in perfect order and perfect step—the finest looking troops in the world, one would say. And these, with the battalion of Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, made up five kilted battalions

Besides these welcome new arrivals there were others, notably a regiment of cavalry (the 12th Lancers), a Howitzer* Battery of Artillery, G Battery of Royal Horse Artillery,† and two new batteries of Field Artillery (the 73rd and 65th), besides a balloon section. The Gordons, too, were on their way.

So that the army now consisted of the Guards' Brigade of four battalions, the Highland Brigade of five kilted battalions, and the 9th Brigade of four battalions of infantry ; two regiments of cavalry ; some mounted infantry ; Rimington's Guides—who did anything and everything they were asked to do, and a little bit over ; Naval Brigade, with "Joe Chamberlain," a 4·7 mounted on Captain Scott's carriage ; five batteries Field Artillery ; one of Horse Artillery ; numerous Engineers ; men of the Service Corps ; R.A.M.C. staff, and the section in charge of the balloon. It was a splendid fighting force, fit to go anywhere and do anything, and as full of confidence and fight as an army could be. If it was weak anywhere it was in the point of mobility and inability to pursue—having only a small body of cavalry and but one battery of horse guns.

Naturally, Lord Methuen's first employment after fording the Modder was to ascertain the whereabouts of his enemy ; and he soon discovered that there was no need to go so far as Spytfontein to find him. So far, indeed, from Cronje being a long way off, he was only one march, and that short, being encamped at Magersfontein, about 2½ miles away or rather more. True, his main position was at Spytfontein ; but he did not intend, if he could help it, to fight Methuen at Spytfontein, where Kekewich might, by a bold sortie, fall upon his rear whilst the relief column assaulted him in front. By no means—Cronje knew a trick worth two of that ; and, if he had not known, he had in his camp plenty of polyglot soldiers, men speaking every language under the sun, and united only in two things—love of Kruger's gold and hatred of the English. Still, be it said, these were skilful officers, tacticians, artillerists, and engineers.

In pursuance of his plan of fighting Methuen as far away from Kimberley as possible, the Boer commandant had set to work many weeks before and entrenched a position at Magersfontein—that is, he had prepared the ground for occupation by his riflemen and gunners with deep trenches having wire entanglements in the front, gun emplacements, stone sangars, and every other device known in military science to render a position secure against attack. The point selected for the defence lay between Modder River and Spytfontein, and was highly favourable, naturally, for defence. Equally, it was unfavourable for attack.

Lord Methuen, indeed, debated long whether or no he should attack it. It seems to the ordinary, common-sense person—and, after all, the supreme strategy is nothing more than the application of the highest common-sense—that it must be unwise to attack in the front an enemy whose force is equal to your own in numbers and quite equal in skill with the rifle. Especially does such a frontal attack require justification when that enemy occupies a strong position, selected by himself weeks beforehand, and fortified

* A field howitzer gun is a short gun, of large bore (5-in. diameter) and low velocity. It carries a 45 lb. charge, and is generally fired at a high angle, so that the shell drops almost vertically. It can fire either shrapnel, lyddite, or common shell.

† Horse Batteries are known by letters A, B, C, etc.--Field Batteries by numbers.

with minutest care and skill. Napoleon had a maxim :—"Never attack the enemy where he expects you to." Lord Methuen knew well what risk he was running when he determined to hurl his battalions straight at Cronje's position ; and he only made up his mind to run that risk as being the least of a choice of evils.

If you look at the map you will see that the Modder takes its course from north-east to south-west (about), and that by marching along the northern bank the relief column would have approached somewhat nearer to Kimberley on the eastern side of the town. This route would have avoided Magersfontein, and would have secured water for the troops for a considerable distance. Lord Methuen rejected this route because, so long as the enemy held Magersfontein, his (Methuen's) line of communications would have been in danger. Besides, there were no roads for the guns, and the river bank was covered with scrub, very difficult for the passage of troops with artillery ; and the enemy was in occupation of the hills leading from Magersfontein to the bank of the river, whence he would be able to inflict heavy loss on a column trying to brush past.

Another way would have been to strike off to the right along the road to Jacobsdal, which is between the Riet and the Modder, and, on reaching there, turn sharp to the left and go north again, reaching Kimberley through Beaconsfield (see Map, p. 230). Here there would have been a good road all the way, and again the fortified heights of Magersfontein would have been avoided. But this route had its disadvantages. It meant traversing the two long sides of a triangle instead of the one short side. It meant leaving the railway, and thus leaving the troops dependent upon waggon transport for food and other supplies. Now, Lord Methuen's transport would not carry supplies for his column for more than five days. Again, the Jacobsdal route meant crossing the River Modder again. The chances were a thousand to one that the enemy would be kept informed of the British movements, and on the 28th of November the British general had had quite as much experience as he desired of the difficulty of crossing a stream the opposite bank of which was held by Boer marksmen.

The last-named difficulty notwithstanding, there could be little doubt that the safest and soundest plan was to make this flank march *via* Jacobsdal. There was, of course, some danger of the enemy descending from his heights to try to cut communications. But Lord Methuen's chief reason for not adopting the course which he saw to be, from a military point of view, soundest, was lack of transport. He was practically tied by the heels to the railway line, and Cronje knew it as well as he did.

Why, then, did not the British general sit down at Modder River camp for another month if need be and organise a sufficient and efficient transport service ? Why did he not telegraph and write to, and otherwise bully the authorities at Cape Town and tell them that he could not with safety or with reasonable chance of success move another yard without waggons and more waggons, mules and more mules, oxen and more oxen ? The only explanation seems to be a political one. Kimberley was not in any very serious danger for a time, but the authorities had peremptorily demanded that it should be relieved forthwith. Methuen's orders were to push on with all speed, and it was to the political exigencies of the moment that Britain owed the

cutting to pieces of one of her most magnificent regiments, the severe defeat of her proudest infantry, the death of one of her most valiant commanders, and, what was far worse than any of these things, the demoralisation of a whole brigade.

To sum up the criticism:—Had the means been at hand (in the way of transport) the proper plan of attack would have been by a turning movement *via* Jacobsdal. But the means were not at hand, and to wait for the organisation of an efficient transport service would have meant flat disobedience to orders. Every other way of reaching Kimberley meant fighting at a disadvantage, but three times already had Lord Methuen been able to drive the enemy out of positions strongly fortified and held in force; and there seemed no reason why he should not succeed a fourth time. One can only come to the conclusion that the British general was commanded to make bricks without straw, and that he was expected to succeed in his undertaking because he had succeeded before. And, to do him justice, he was not far from success again. Nor would his failure have been made the subject of comments such as were passed at the time had it not been for the currency given to a rumour to which we shall presently refer.

To return to the order of events: General Methuen sent out daily patrols and parties of Rimington's Scouts, the two regiments of Lancers, and the Mounted Infantry companies to feel the enemy, and see what he was doing; and the parties found out and reported that a large body with guns was established at Magersfontein. The daily patrols were not without danger, especially to those parties under officers not used to the wily ways of the enemy and quite new to the country. The Boers were also scouring the country in small parties, but their craft was much superior to ours; and the result was that they frequently knew of the presence of our scouts long before ours knew anything of them. Their plan of action was then exceedingly simple. Seeing one of our patrols, consisting of four men and one officer, riding in a given direction, the Boers would head them off by going across country; then, hiding their ponies in a cleft in the ground, they would lie in wait behind boulders (generally on hillsides), past which they thought the British patrol would ride.

Soon appears the little knot of horsemen, cantering gaily along, with, probably, some young lieutenant in charge. The Boers do not fire as soon as the party is within range—by no means. They wait until it has gone past their lurking-place. Then the Mausers speak, and it is odd if one or two men and horses do not fall. The patrol is probably very much startled. There is not a sign to be seen of the enemy's whereabouts, for the Mausers burn smokeless powder, and the marksmen are hidden skilfully, as only born hunters can hide. All the patrol knows is that the foe is near at hand, and between it and the British camp; and so the first impulse is to turn round and dash past the hill again. If this resolution be taken it means more loss, in all probability.

Sometimes the Boers surround their prey, as a hunter draws a cordon of guns round the thicket where he knows the game to be; and then the chances of the patrol are not worth much. Two patrols of the 12th Lancers were surrounded on the same day (December 6th), and had the narrowest of escapes. In one case a patrol of four Lancers and a man of "Rimington's Tigers," under command of Lieutenant Fane, was completely surrounded, and had

THE HIGHLANDERS SURPRISED IN CLOSE ORDER.

to cut its way through with, luckily, no more loss than one man wounded and one horse killed. The other party was not so lucky. The Boers got them in a regular death-trap, with rifles on three sides and the river on the fourth. "The river!" shouted the officer, Lieutenant Tristram. And hard for the river they galloped, bullets whistling about their ears the while. Tristram was the last man, and one of the four men had his horse shot. The young officer stayed to help him, bullets from shorter and shorter range spattering about him. One hits him; then another. The rest of the patrol has reached the Modder and urge the horses across, but Tristram turns to face the foe. They rush at him, seeing him alone and bleeding, and he receives them with revolver loaded. Six rapid shots. Two Boers will need the doctor. But the others rush on him, and, despite the rapid play of his sword, overpower him, though not until he is nearly dropping from loss of blood.

A brave young officer, this. Not, perhaps, a careful scout. But still a valiant man—a credit to his regiment. As to the rest of the patrol, one man is wounded and another man drowned. Thus was valuable fighting material lost to the Army by carelessness in scouting—a carelessness that caused General Buller, in commenting on a small affair in which we lost lives by the same fault, to observe rather bitterly, "I suppose our officers will learn the value of scouting in time; but, in spite of all one can say, up to this our men seem to blunder into the middle of the enemy and suffer accordingly."

Besides the innumerable skirmishes of the scouts, such as might have been expected when the opposing forces were no more than five miles apart, there was one serious attempt to cut the column's communications. To guard the line between Orange River and Modder River two companies of Northamptons had been left at Enslin—a distinction for which, by the way, the said two companies were anything but truly thankful. But they were soon to be enlivened; for on December 7th some of them out scouting discovered that just south of Gras Pan the railway had been tampered with and the telegraph cut. Hardly had the scouts returned with these tidings than close on their heels appeared the advance guard of a Boer commando, 1,000 strong, with a field gun. The 200 Northamptons could hardly expect to cope with a force like this, so they telegraphed up to Modder River.

The 12th Lancers, the Seaforth Highlanders, and a battery of Field Artillery were soon on the rails, hurrying down to the point threatened, and spoiling for a fight. At 11 a.m. they reached Enslin, to the great relief of the handful who were manfully holding the foe at bay. A few rounds of shrapnel, one or two volleys from the Seaforths, and the c mmando made off. The Lancers rode hard, trying to get to the rear of the enemy, so as to cut off his retreat; but the Boers had no intention either of standing up to a charge of cavalry or of being captured, so, with their usual fleetness in retreat, they got away safely.

A survey down the line showed the extent of the damage done by this force. They had blown up a railway culvert and removed a long piece of telegraph wire. If, however, they imagined that this would delay operations very long they were mistaken. The Royal Engineers put their best foot foremost, and, with a rapidity perfectly astounding, made the culvert fit for the passage of traffic and the telegraph line ready to bear messages within twenty-

four hours. It was, indeed, wonderful to a degree the amount of work accomplished by the Royal Engineers who accompanied the Kimberley relief column. They threw a new bridge over the Modder in a week—not a foot-bridge merely, but a railway bridge ; and at the same time laid a little bit of new railway to connect each end of the new bridge with the existing lines of rail. You will appreciate the difficulties of this undertaking when it is explained that the river at this point is about 250 feet wide, and the banks some 50 feet higher than the bed.

The accomplishment of this task was without a hitch. Colonel Sharpe, Lieut.-Colonel Kincaid, and Major Von Donop were in command of the smart detachment, which worked day and night for a week bridge-building ; and well they justified the proud traditions of that corps, who do not know the meaning of *impossible*. It had taken the Boers nine days to wreck the old bridge. It took two days less for the Royal Engineers to build a new one.

On December 7th the first train ran across the bridge, carrying guns ; and on the 9th Lord Methuen moved along the line with cavalry, infantry, his horse artillery, and the naval 4·7. The naval gun dropped a little lyddite into the enemy's positions, but there was no reply. Without having obtained any result, the reconnoitring force returned to camp the same morning ; and in the afternoon of the 10th, beginning at 4.50, Lord Methuen ordered a bombardment of the enemy's position by his heavy artillery. Just before that hour the howitzer battery moved out of camp towards the Boer left, and the 4·7 was placed on a ridge to the north of our camp.

For rather more than two hours these tremendous weapons plied the Boer trenches with common shell, shrapnel, and lyddite. Every gun was beautifully worked, and it seemed as if every shell landed in the Boer position. For twenty minutes there was no reply, but at the end of that time guns began to boom out from Magersfontein Kopje. As soon as any Boer gun disclosed itself, the sailors turned their gun on it and rained shells on it at the rate of six or eight a minute. The Boer gunners aimed well, but for rapidity of fire they were nowhere ; and one by one their guns lapsed sullenly into silence. Then howitzers and naval guns "searched" the trenches, until at last the British general, thinking the foe must be disheartened by this time, commanded "Cease fire."

Disheartened! Events proved that it took a great deal of shell-fire to dishearten these burghers. Even when, some ten weeks later, several thousands of them were cooped up in a place whence there was no escape, and subjected to a fire hotter to infinity than this, it took a long time to dishearten them. Disheartened! They were laughing all the time at the cannonade. For although our lyddite was bursting among them, our shrapnel scattering lead and iron over their trenches, this same lyddite and shrapnel did no harm whatever, for the simplest of reasons—that the Boers were not in the trenches. At the first symptom of artillery attack they retired a long way behind their position into cave-like holes absolutely bomb-proof. Only when the operation of searching the trenches was concluded did they re-occupy them.

The shelling over, Lord Methuen communicated to the brigade commanders his plans. In short, this was an infantry attack, to be delivered at daybreak the next morning, this assault to be supported by all the guns with the

column. The Highland Brigade was selected for the honour of making the attack, with the Guards' Brigade to protect their right and rear. The march from the camp to the point from which the rush was to be made would have to be undertaken in the dark, and the column was to be guided by Major Benson, R.A., who had at great personal risk gone over the ground to take the bearings and distance. One mistake, a serious one, was made. The men were never told that they were being sent to storm a position. The general impression in the ranks was that they were shifting camp.

Wauchope's disposition of his force was this: the brigade was to move in quarter-column of half battalions—that is, in close formation—until they arrived at the south-west spur of the kopje. Such a close formation was never intended to be maintained during the assault; but on arriving at the point in question the Black Watch was to move off to the east of the kopje, the Seaforths on the left of them to the south-east of it, with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders on their left. The Highland Light Infantry was to remain in the rear, ready to be called up to strengthen the

THE DEATH OF A STRETCHER BEARER AT MAGERSFONTEIN.

fignting line at whatever point it might be needed. The Gordons, who had just arrived, did not accompany the brigade, but remained as guard to convoy

In the afternoon (10th) tents were struck ; in the evening at about 8.30 the brigade moved to the north of the river ; and at 12.30 it marched out. The night was pitch dark—such entire absence of light as the town dweller has little idea of—and at 10 p.m. the rain began. It was not a steady rain ; but a succession of blinding, drenching showers, coming from the left—fit precursor of that other succession of showers to follow later from the same direction. The left guide (the outside man on the left) of the Seaforths was wet through on the left side, and quite dry on the right. A commander who makes a night attack always prays for the darkest night and the heaviest rain : thus the enemy will not see his men nor hear their footfalls. How far this attack was expected by the Boers cannot be said. The official despatch avers that signals were made from our camp by the flashing of a lantern ; and two rifles went off accidentally ere the march began.

Away went the Highlanders, and it had a ghastly effect as these regiments moved off to see them swallowed up in the blackness. It was two steps—and vanished ! They vanished into the streaming darkness, proudly, confidently, the kilts giving an almost contemptuous swish as battalion after battalion swung out. The Black Watch led the column, with the Seaforths next behind, then the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, and then the Highland Light Infantry. So dense was the darkness that the left guides of the column had to use ropes to keep their position ; but they kept it with this aid, and the brigade moved steadily forward. Benson's guiding of the column was admirable. Over the rough ground, stumbling, but still keeping touch, hardly a symptom of a break in the ranks. Here are some scrub bushes—whisper along the ranks "Fours !" and the Black Watch forms fours by sheer instinct. Through the scrub, it is a bit better on the other side. Seaforths round the bushes to the right, Sutherlands follow.

Slowly the 73rd forces a way through the scrub and forms up in quarter column with the Seaforths in rear. This is splendid. There wants but twenty-five minutes to daybreak ; and Wauchope's heart beats high ; for as yet the Dutchmen have made no sign. And once the Highlanders are within charging distance, the whole Boer army could not stop them. The Seaforths move out to the left of the 73rd. Still the Boer trenches sleep. The great kopje looms silent aloft. The time has come for the cold steel.

But as the Scotsmen were tramping through the darkness, the watchfulness of an old soldier has brought Piet Cronje from his tent. He walks through the trenches in the night, to see what ward is kept. He peers out into the blackness. What is that ? Listen ! Allemachtige ! The English ! Piet Cronje drops to earth. "Shoot ! Shoot !" The word has just come to the Black Watch to deploy—when—

Suddenly, "as though," to use the language of one of the soldiers, "the curtain had gone up at a theatre," a tremendous blaze of musketry broke out thirty yards in front. The Black Watch, caught by the deadly hail in close formation, was shattered as an oak is shattered by lightning. The head of the column was broken in, and men and officers dropped by scores. Still the battalion, caught in a trap as it was,

decimated by the terrible fire at pistol-shot distance, obeyed the order, "Fix bayonets!" The few unwounded men brought their bayonets to the charge and cheered, only to receive the order, "Retire!" Who gave that order was never known; but if it was any British officer his responsibility was great. For there was only one hope left, and that was for the 73rd to rush in at the nearest trench and get in with the cold steel.

In a moment all was confusion. The Black Watch turned and fled—fled as men flee for their lives. The Seaforths, not far in rear, were opening out, and the routed front battalion burst into them and through their ranks, pursued by the deadly Mauser bullets. Hardly an officer was left unwounded, and the men knew not what to do without orders. The Seaforths were for a time shaken, but they soon recovered steadiness, and every man threw himself on the ground and opened fire on the trenches ahead. Not a foe could be seen, nothing but a constant flash of the Mausers, for it was still dark. The other battalions of the brigade also threw themselves down, and blazed away at the invisible enemy in front. As to the Black Watch, the fright they had received was so real that only a few of them had presence of mind enough to lie down amongst their brethren of the Seaforths and join the firing. Meanwhile, the trenches in front and flank vomited lead.

Day broke with the forces in this position:—The Seaforths 600 yards from the enemy's trenches, lying down and firing furiously; the Argyll and Sutherland battalion on the left a little farther back, also lying down and firing; the Highland Light Infantry in the rear. And ever from the trenches, from front and left flank, poured forth the everlasting hail of death. From higher up the kopje great guns were beginning to belch forth their thunders on the devoted Highlanders. A few of the Black Watch who had not shared the panic still clung to the ground in the left front of the Seaforths.

With the light the artillery moved up to the rescue, and began to play upon the kopje. And then, Wauchope being mortally wounded, Colonel Hughes Hallett, of the Seaforths, ordered his men to advance by half companies and try to rush the trenches. The men responded bravely, and gained about 200 yards, but beyond that they could not go. The deadly Mausers cut off every man of them, as a scythe cuts corn in swathes.

There was no question of expense; for in a frontal attack on trenches held by marksmen armed with magazine rifles this must necessarily be great; but it was not a case of expensive victory. It was simply impossible to advance. So the Seaforths lay down again on their faces and again poured in as hot a rifle-fire as they could. Indeed, the breech-pieces of their rifles grew so hot they could hardly handle the weapons. There were in the front rank of the Seaforths two brothers, one a non-commissioned officer, one a private. The non-com., who was the elder, made his way in the dark to his brother. "Let's stick together," said he, "and if we are to die, let's die together." So the rest of that eventful day these two stayed side by side, until, the elder being thrice wounded, the other carried him out of action.

For five hours the Highlanders lay prone. A man lifted his hand, three bullets pierced it. Another, contriving to turn on his back, cautiously brought his water-bottle to his mouth. A dozen bullets riddled the vessel and spilled the precious fluid. But about 9 o'clock a

moment came when the Mausers ceased to rain so continuously upon the plain their deadly drops of lead. It seemed as though our shrapnel and lyddite had taken effect. All that remained of the Black Watch crawled up near the Seaforths. "Up! Charge!" And again with magnificent bravery the kilted heroes hurled themselves forward. Again the trenches vomited death in sheets. There is an officer well in advance. He waves his helmet in the air—"Follow me, lads!" and straight he rushes for the enemy. Three hundred yards he runs, unscathed through the fire. "Follow me, lads!" Alas! these are his last words; for the sound has hardly carried to the ears of the men to whom he calls when he drops on the veldt, bleeding at a dozen points.

It is horrible. Valour seems for once of no avail. The officers are shot down in such numbers that colour-sergeants are leading half-battalions. Down again! And once more the Highlanders fling themselves on the brown earth. There they lie for another good hour—another hour in the broiling sun. They fire at the parapet of the entrenchments—about the only thing to be seen to fire at, for the foe is hidden with all his old skill.

And as they lie they think bitter thoughts. That they, the Highland Brigade, the men who have fought in every climate and every latitude, against foes white and black and brown, should be compelled to lie here for hour after hour, only able to move under penalty of being shot like rabbits. One man, a non-commissioned officer of Seaforths, keeps collecting small parties of a dozen men or so, and leading them at the entrenchments; but time and time again the little bands of heroes are mown down—only their fiery, desperate leader escaping unhurt. And Wauchope, the Highlanders' "Andra'" Wauchope, their pride and hope, has been shot down; and colonel and captain, major and lieutenant, have shared the same fate. Some lie even now between our firing line and those accursed entrenchments.

Hark! Is that a cheer? Yes, it is the slogan of the Gordons, the gay Gordons. These are the boys who stormed the heights of Dargai—they have no Pathans to deal with this time, though. Steadily and sturdily they advance in wide, open lines; spreading themselves out over the plain. Surely they will take the position if anybody can. At 11 a.m. they come on, firing as they come, the last hope of the Highland Brigade; for the battalions that have been lying on the plain for so many hours exposed to the terrible heat of the South African sun are quite unfit to carry on the assault. The Gordons are dotted over the ground like a cloud, and they take every inch of cover; and thus they fight their way to within 600 yards of the enemy's entrenchments.

After that there is little or no protection for them; and though a few devoted officers struggle on, followed by men as devoted, and contrive in places almost to reach the foremost trenches, for the most part the attacking infantry find it impossible to get nearer. There are wire fences, every one a death trap, along which Highlanders may be seen lying in rows, some bleeding, some still in death. For not only is there to be faced in that last quarter of a mile the broadside from the trenches in front, but the enemy, with great skill and foresight, have digged trenches crosswise and at different angles, so that a cross-fire salutes every man and every detachment attempting to cross that deadly plain.

Wauchope was lying in front, dead by this time. The colonel of the Gordons

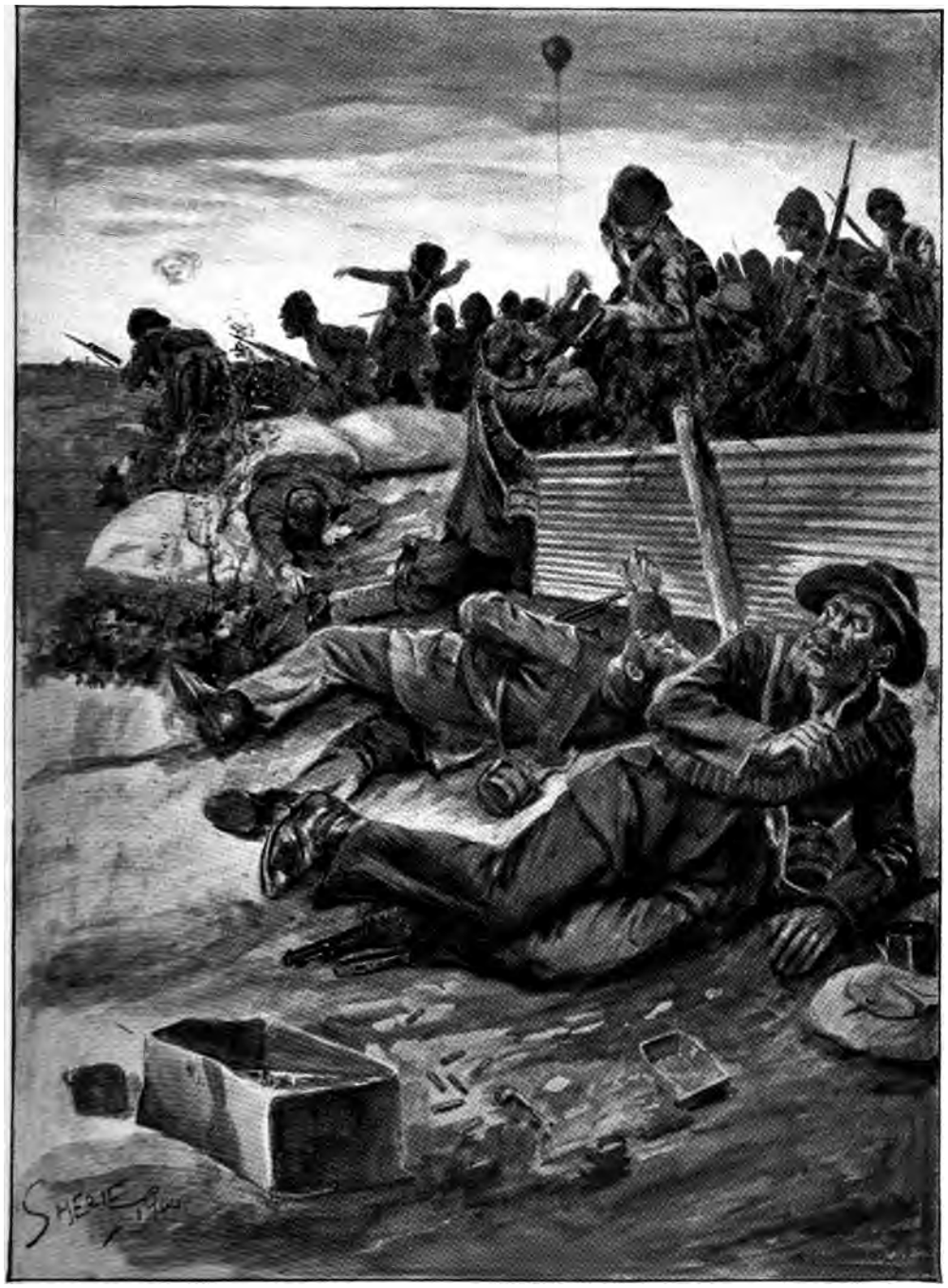
was within thirty yards of the trenches when he, too, was shot down. Nearly forty officers of the brigade were lying on that fatal field, struck down, every man of them, leading his troops to the assault. Of the bravery, the magnificent bravery of officers and men, there could be no doubt. If the Highland Brigade had its Flodden at Magersfontein it was through no lack of courage ; and for hours, from three in the morning until six in the evening, the men were exposed to the fire of the Transvaal marksmen, and the killing heat and glare of the sun. Against hope they hoped that in time the artillery would subdue the fire of the trenches sufficiently to enable the last hundreds of yards to be rushed ; and then—for one half hour with the cold steel ! Half an hour was all they asked ; and they hung on grimly, and prayed to the God of battles to grant them that half hour of vengeance.

The guns of the Royal Artillery and the Naval Brigade worked at a tremendous rate, and it was due to them that our losses were not greater than they proved to be. As for rifle fire, we were unable to do anything effective ; and this for the very good reason that we could see nobody to fire at. It seems absurd, but is nevertheless a fact, that many men were in the firing line for the whole of that day and never saw a Boer, so well had the enemy concealed himself. And our only hope lay in being able to pour in such a heavy artillery fire as to make the trenches untenable. Much execution was, undoubtedly, done by the lyddite and the shrapnel, and the moral effect produced was even greater than the damage done.

Our shells did not, it is true, frighten the enemy so much as at the Modder River battle, probably because his troops were now more accustomed to shell-fire. At the same time, it is impossible for riflemen, even the hardiest and steadiest, to aim so correctly and pull the trigger so coolly and steadily when the air above and around them is filled with the shriek and buzz of huge bursting shells, as it would be under less nerve-shaking circumstances. Thus the Boer fire was to some extent quelled and demoralised ; and, had it not been so, it is difficult to see how a man of the Highland Brigade could have escaped.

That the enemy suffered enormously from our guns there can be no doubt—they admitted as much themselves. That they continued to hold their position in face of such losses was proof positive of their bravery and tenacity. A day came when they had to bear a shell-fire to which this, severe as it was, was child's play ; and again they stuck to their posts. And, indeed, it seemed that they could face anything except the steel. Once let our infantry or our cavalry get to thrusting distance, and the burghers' courage oozed away. But on this day their tactics prevailed. They were successful in keeping the bayonets at a distance ; and, so long as they did this, no frontal attack could touch them.

Now came out of camp the Guards' Brigade, the 12th Lancers, and the Mounted Infantry companies ; and while the Guards deployed to the right to protect the Highlanders' flank, the cavalrymen and Mounted Infantry dismounted and went into the firing line to support the Argyll and Sutherlands and the Highland Light Infantry. The battle raged along the line from Magersfontein kopje to Brown's Drift on the Modder River. The troops were disposed somewhat as follows :—The Gordons had passed through the ranks of the original Highland Brigade, and were menacing the trenches at the foot (front)



"SHORT SHRIFT THEY GAVE TO THE MEN THEY FOUND THERE" (p. 288).

of the kopje. Behind them were their brother Highlanders, some Field Artillery, and the Scots Guards. On the left rear, to guard against a flanking movement in that quarter, were four companies of the Loyal North Lancashires. In the middle rear, behind the Scots Guards, the Fighting Fifth waited, while the Yorkshire Light Infantry, in two detachments, held posts on the river. The Coldstreams and Grenadiers were on the right of the Highlanders, in the front of the fighting, while the 12th Lancers and Mounted Infantry had got mixed up with the Kilties, and were pushing forward.

For a short time it seemed as though the attack must succeed after all. A few Gordons and Mounted Infantry, struggling through the wire fences, actually came on top of the Boer trenches, and short shrift they gave to the men they found there. They even took prisoners some who surrendered ; and the battle might well have taken a turn from this moment had there been someone to lead—someone to give orders for a concerted and effectual attack. But there was nobody. The men were fighting in little groups, some under officers, some without orders at all ; and the gallant fellows who had already fleshed their bayonets in the nearest trenches were soon compelled to retire. For Cronje, the Boer general, fearing the British rush, had constructed other trenches commanding those in front ; and commanding them in such a way that they formed no protection.

In fact, the stormers found themselves, when they had taken the first entrenchments, no whit better off than they had been before. Worse if anything. A blasting fusillade swept them on either side, and they found it impossible to live in that terrible enfilade. So they retired, bearing their wounded with them and leading their prisoners, but leaving behind one or two to testify that not everywhere and every time had the British infantry been repulsed.

Fiercely the battle raged. On the Boer left, where one side of the Magersfontein slopes down to the Modder, the ground was covered with bushes, and here the Boers had trenches pushed well out from their main line. And they also occupied a house by Brown's Drift, where the Yorkshires were stationed. It was in this part of the field that the enemy lost most heavily. First the men of the Big County moved upon the house, whence proceeded a hot and galling fire. There was a little cover here ; and the attacking companies dodged and crawled and ran from point to point, still keeping up on the house a continuous discharge of musketry. Soon they are near. One company lies down and keeps up a covering fire ; the other fixes bayonets and makes ready for the rush. The word is given! Up! And with their curious deep-bass shout the Yorkshiremen rush in at the double. The pace quickens. The bullets shower faster on and amongst the stormers. This is a sight to kindle the fire of our race-pride, a sight to make the blood hot and fill the voice with passion. On! For the honour of the White Rose, on! Men fall. There is one, struck in three places. See! He raises himself on his elbow—he lifts his helmet and waves it—"Forward, boys!" he shouts. "Give 'em the steel!" And his comrades rush to the killing with the grimness and the fury that has marked the Tyke for centuries.

Soon they are battering at the house. They fire through the woodwork, they tear and drive at the door with the butt, and shoulder, and arms, as if they would pull the house down. The door yields. They

are in. A shout, and yet another. A scream, and yet another. For the shouts of triumph are blended with the shrieks of men calling upon the Almighty for the mercy they do not expect from men. And the Yorkshiremen slay and shout until their boots are red and no scream of pain makes discord.

one thrust was needed. Then, with a heave that was part of the same motion as the thrust, the body, pierced through, was hurled away. Some few of the Scandinavians surrendered, but most of them died like heroes. And in half an hour there was not left upon the field a single one of this contingent who was not

"THEY LAID IN HIS GRAVE ANDREW WAUCHOPE" (*p.* 292).

The Guards, too, had some killing. In their part of the field there were some trenches held by a strong picket of Cronje's men, most of them Scandinavians, volunteers or mercenaries in the Transvaal army. At these, through the bushes, the Guards went with a rush, and, under cover of a tremendous fire, charged into them. This was the ghastliest and bloodiest work of the day. The burly Guardsmen drove in the bayonet until rifle-barrel clashed against breast-bone. Never more than killed or wounded or prisoner. And so the fight wore on until an hour past noon.

The Yorkshire Light Infantry, on the Drift, was blazing away. The Guards (except one battalion of Coldstreams) were amongst the bushes, half a mile away, and also firing every cartridge that could be had—for it was no easy matter to get ammunition up to the firing line. The Highlanders, led by the Gordons and stiffened by some ot the Coldstreams, were lying down. Then came an order—at

about 1.30—for the Highland Brigade to retire about 500 yards and there re-form and hold the enemy. They did so, though not easily; because as soon as ever the enemy saw anything out of cover they fired upon it as vigorously as they had earlier in the day. Then the men lay down again to bake, with swollen tongues and parched throats. Some had had breakfast—or, rather, a ration of biscuit—before setting out in the morning, and some had not. They had been trapped, more than decimated, were almost officerless, tired, hungry, thirsty; many lame by reason of the skin being peeled off their legs; and, in fact, they were in such a state as the Highlanders never were in before. For they were shaken to their very souls.

Still they faced the music again when Colonel Downman, of the Gordons, called on them for another rush. But that gallant officer fell injured mortally, and the attack failed again. Then once more the word came, "Retire!" and the brigade fell back. They were told to hold their position until dark, when they and the Guards would be sent to try again to rush the trenches; and they did hold on until dusk. But at that moment Cronje turned his guns on them, and this completed their discomfiture. Like one man they fell back, almost to the camp, abandoning the precious yards of ground they had so dearly won by the lives of their dearest, the blood of their bravest.

The battle was over. The British force had been defeated.

That night the men bivouacked where the darkness had found them, only the naval guns booming away until the sailors could no longer see the mark. Lord Methuen thought it possible that Magersfontein might end as had ended the previous battle, where, as you remember, the enemy fled during the night. But the morning found the trenches still occupied, and the word to retire was sent round. Wherefore, on the morning of Tuesday, December the 12th, the whole force returned to Modder River camp.

Did we say "the whole force"? Alas! It was the whole remaining force; but how different from the army that had set out in the small hours of the previous morning. The men were, for the most part, gaunt and haggard, and the gaps in the ranks were heartrending. The Guards had lost heavily, the Yorkshires had great gaps in their ranks, but the Highland Brigade it was which had suffered the most. In all, the attackers had lost 23 officers and 148 men killed; 45 officers and 647 men wounded; and 107 men missing and prisoners. Three officers and 36 men of the wounded subsequently succumbed to their injuries. Altogether a total of 970 casualties out of an army of 11,000 men, of whom about one-third were never engaged. And out of this list the Highlanders claimed about 650 officers and men.

The loss would have been heavy even as the price of victory. As the penalty of defeat it was grievous and hardly to be borne. And a worse thing than this had happened; worse a hundred times from a military point of view. After the fearful defeat at Stormberg it was very noticeable that General Gatacre's troops, despite the experience they had gone through, were in nowise broken in spirit, nor had they lost confidence in their commander. They were sure, in their own minds, that "Old Back-acher" would pull them through in the end, that he was the victim of treachery, that the Government had given him a task too big for the means at his disposal. They felt nothing but sorrow for the man who himself had gone into

action at the head of the leading company.

After the battle at Colenso, which accentuated Stormberg and Magersfontein so cruelly, the army of Natal and every section of it still had confidence in Sir Redvers Buller. They were only repulsed; the day would soon come when their general would lead them to victory; this defeat was a bit of very hard lines; and so on.

But after the battle of Magersfontein there can be no doubt that part of the Kimberley Relief Column had, for a time, lost confidence in its general. That part was the Highland Brigade. How it all came about let us now record; for the matter is full of food for reflection, and one can see "what a great matter a little fire kindleth." At an early volley from the Boer trenches Major-General Wauchope, the brigadier of the Highlanders, fell mortally wounded. Some of the men of his old regiment, the Black Watch, who were greatly attached to him, ran to his assistance; and he is reported to have said to these men with his dying breath, "Good bye, men. Do not blame me for this." The words have been reported with verbal differences, but the effect is the same in every case.

After the battle—ay, and before the battle was over—Wauchope's last words flew round the ranks of his Highlanders; and the brigade—or, rather, the men in the ranks—put upon them this interpretation. That Lord Methuen had commanded General Wauchope, the night before the battle, to march his brigade to the point to which they did march in quarter column. That Wauchope remonstrated, pointing out the danger of that formation if the enemy should happen not to be surprised. That Lord Methuen, with some asperity, told Wauchope to obey orders, upon which Wauchope obeyed, but only under protest. Further, that Wauchope had strongly urged upon his commander the inadvisability of making an attack direct on Magersfontein at all.

The evidence in support of Wauchope's alleged difference of opinion with Lord Methuen upon the points of strategy and tactics is of the slenderest, consisting as it does of mere camp gossip. That Wauchope said something of the kind he is reported to have said there can be little doubt, for there are still living many of the men of the Black Watch who heard him; and, though the inherent probability seems to be against those men, yet one has no doubt in saying that their story is one supported by evidence which would be believed, say, in a court of law. But of this one may be certain, that Andrew Wauchope, officer and gentleman, soldier and Christian, did not, with his last breath, utter words intended to be a reflection upon his commanding officer; and that quite apart from the question whether or no the commanding officer was in fact to blame. Andrew Wauchope was as loyal and true-hearted a gentleman as ever bore the Queen's commission; and for him, under any circumstances whatever, publicly to blame his general was a moral impossibility.

Probably the words were slightly coloured—perhaps unconsciously coloured—in the repetition, as words often are. But in any case it is safe to say that those last words of his were foully misinterpreted. There is no blinking the fact, however, that the Highlanders almost to a man, from that moment, held Lord Methuen responsible for the defeat, and from that moment they lost all confidence in him. Now, as Napoleon said long ago, "In war the moral is

to the physical, as three is to one." It became impossible from that moment to trust the Highland Brigade under the command of Lord Methuen

As to how far the disasters of the day were fairly to be laid to his account is quite another story. Be it said that he certainly never ordered an attack in quarter column —no man in his senses would suggest such an absurdity; but only that the march up to the point where the brigade was to form for the attack was to be made in that formation. The exact spot where the brigade should deploy would be a matter for the brigadier who was handling it. And, as has been mentioned earlier in the chapter, Wauchope would have opened out his column into line some two or three hundred yards before he actually gave the order had it not been for the nature of the ground. That the Black Watch blundered into—or, rather, were led up to—a trench the existence of which nobody suspected cannot be gainsaid. The fact was proved by the ghastliest evidence beyond all controversy. Nor can there be any question that the loss of the battle was in no way chargeable to the troops themselves. For something like ten hours they had nobody to lead them, nobody to form a plan of attack for them, and it is to the wholesale slaughter of the Scottish officers that the repulse was owing more than to any other one thing. Had Wauchope escaped unwounded for another hour there is little doubt that Cronje would have been driven out of his position.

But it was not to be. Cronje rested secure in his fastnesses. Wauchope lay on the veldt a corpse. And on Tuesday there was an armistice for the burying of the dead. Parties went out with spades—comrades of the dead men, and Engineers. They dug long trenches and therein laid the bodies of the slain. Highlanders, in their bloodstained kilts, slept thus the long sleep together. So dreadful did they look that the Engineers, the gravediggers, broke down and cried like women. And the unwounded remnant of the kilted warriors gathered round. Some wept for their comrades; some were too sore stricken to weep.

So they laid in his grave Andrew Wauchope, bravest of the brave, the general whom all Scotsmen would follow, the man whom all Scotsmen loved. He came of a chivalrous race; nor in life nor death did he prove unworthy. The pipes skirled out their lament, like the wailing of a host of wraiths. The chaplain consigned the body to the dust. The brown earth covered that face so well-beloved. A great, strong Highlander stood, his eye fixed and glazed, his stern visage working. Then broke forth a sob so deep, so heartrending that one knew he had lost a friend closer than a brother.

The stern Scotsmen turned from that graveside, the tattered, shattered remnant of the magnificent soldiery that Wauchope had led to battle. And they swore by clan and kilt and country, by the honour of the regiment and the memory of the dead, that so should the Lord do to them and more also if they wrote not "Andrew Wauchope" with the point of the bayonet in the heart's blood of the Boer sharpshooters. Henceforth the Highlanders fought for vengeance.

And the pipes played "The Flowers of the Forest."

CHAPTER XXV.

BEFORE COLENSO.

NATAL had now become the most important part of the area of operations. Here was the greatest Boer army. Here was a town and arsenal shut up, along with 12,000 British troops. Here the Boer generalissimo, Joubert, was personally conducting the campaign. Wherefore Sir Redvers Buller was ordered to go to Natal himself and take his main army there: to relieve Ladysmith, and then, his forces being joined to White's troops, to descend upon Boer territory in strength — Ladysmith being a favourable spot from which to strike at either Republic. Besides, the Boers having come south of Ladysmith in great force, Buller hoped to crush them between White and himself.

SIR REDVERS BULLER.
(Photo: Knight, Aldershot.)

There was no hurry. As soon as Barton and Hildyard had arrested the further progress of the invaders at Estcourt and Mooi River, their orders were to wait until the commander-in-chief and more battalions arrived. It is just possible that had Hildyard and Barton been allowed, on November 24th, to push forward, had they made a rapid march following up the Boers after the Willow Grange night attack, they might have occupied Colenso and held the Tugela within two days. For the enemy had not then brought down very much artillery; nor had he so many men as he afterwards poured into that district; nor had he then fortified every kop and kopje, every hill and ridge, every mountain and plateau between Colenso and Ladysmith.

A dash in moderate force might possibly have saved many lives and much treasure. But dashes were not the order of the day in Natal. Every movement had to be made with great deliberation —at infantry pace, in fact. More infantry was pouring into Durban, and was being packed off to the front. When these arrived the general would be able to advance with 20,000 men, British infantrymen; and if the Boers did not run away at the sight of such an array, well, the whole lot of them would be wiped out — crushed between the upper and nether millstones of Buller's force and

the Ladysmith garrison. There was no need to hurry. Ladysmith was quite happy. Food to last until the end of January—the garrison playing football matches—the enemy too deadly frightened of the bayonet to try storming the defences. So we took our time.

Sir Redvers Buller arrived in Natal on November 26th, 1899, two days after Hildyard's night attack, and was welcomed right royally and loyally. Durban, where he landed from the sea, was glad to see him, and said so. Maritzburg expressed itself even more warmly. That old-fashioned town had only half recovered from the shock of threatened attack; and the presence of a British general, the man selected by the authorities at home to conduct the whole campaign, assisted, no doubt, to make the Natalians sleep sounder o' nights.

Even at that time the Boer commandant seems to have had some idea of attacking the capital, and his force, finding the direct road, *viâ* Mooi River, too strongly held by us, was moved off to the east. But too much time had been lost now—wasted in merely looting farms. Three new Fusilier battalions, the Royals (London), the Welsh, and the Scottish had been sent on to Mooi River, and three battalions of regulars were at Nottingham Road, hard by Maritzburg. These were the Durhams, Somerset Light Infantry, and the Scottish Rifles.

Now the Boers were admirable scouts, and they had, in addition, many friends in Natal who kept them well posted in such news as it was desirable for them to know. They were cautious fighters also, not given to making attacks blindfold. Therefore they soon discovered that the number of British troops at and about Maritzburg was probably enough to beat them if they attacked, and the number at Mooi River quite able to cut off their retreat. Thus it came to pass that about the 26th of November the burghers south of that place retired round our position at Estcourt and concentrated at Colenso.

General Hildyard immediately pushed his advanced camp up to Frere, about ten miles up the railway line; and here, in the last days of the month, the British troops in Natal concentrated. The country was carefully gone over by Thorneycroft's Horse and Bethune's, the handful of cavalry. Colonel the Earl of Dundonald, not the least able member of a gifted race of fighting men, was now in command of the cavalry and other mounted troops, and he was teaching the irregulars some of the rules of the game. By the 27th Dundonald reported that, according to his information, the enemy had not a man south of Frere; and Sir Redvers Buller promptly ordered the troops at Mooi River, the few at Estcourt, and most of those at Nottingham Road to push on to Frere. The only men left south of that camp were some to guard communications. Frere was selected for the site of the camp because of its healthy position quite as much as for its defensibility and strategic suitability.

My Lord Dundonald was an enterprising officer. No sooner was the camp pushed on to Frere than he suggested a way of utilising the mounted troops, so that it should not be said the horses were eating their heads off. His idea was to go forward with all the mounted infantry and a field battery and, if it were at all possible, to seize the railway bridge crossing the Tugela at Colenso. If this could be done and the bridge held, the question of transport would be solved to a very great extent; for men and stores could then be sent by rail within sixteen miles of Ladysmith. Moreover, if the enemy destroyed the

bridge, our waggons and our men must ford the river; and any day there might descend a flood which would render the stream unfordable for infantry.

The arguments seemed weighty, and Dundonald's plan a good one; and so he went forward from Frere through Chieveley on to the Tugela, that river whose name was to become a household word the Empire through, a winding stream of true South African kind; sometimes so dry that the water is hardly to the knees, a few hours after so deep that it cannot be waded at all. The reconnoitring force was 800 strong, all mounted and nearly all Colonials. There was a mounted company of the King's Royal Rifles and a field battery—the 66th of the Royal Artillery—but the rest of the force was made up of Thorneycroft's and Bethune's mounted Natal volunteers, a few Natal Police, some Natal Carbineers, together with a squadron of the Imperial Light Horse. The Imperials and Thorneycroft's rode in shirt-sleeves, and it says something for the emancipation of modern British generals from the shackles of martinetism that the hardy rough-riders were allowed to dress in this fashion.

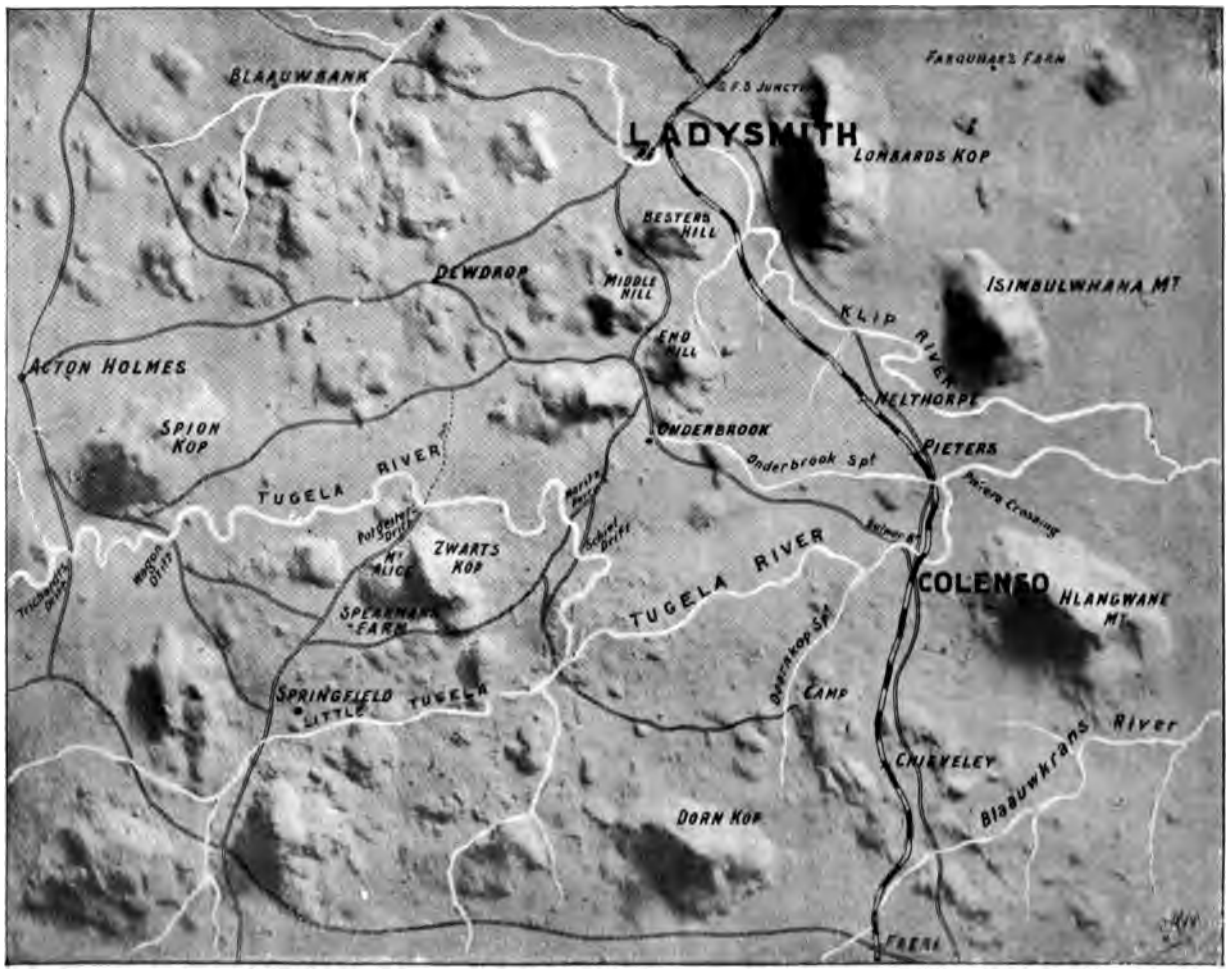
Before long, there were many in the ranks who were glad enough to have shirts to ride in, even sleeveless ones.

Forth rode Dundonald, and reached Chieveley ere sighting or feeling the foe. A mile or two beyond this station there were Boers on kopjes. Not many; and a few screeching shrapnel scared them away. Our horsemen held on for Colenso, stretching in wide open order over a great extent of country, and with the battery in the centre. There is Colenso at last. "Now, you gunners, just wake them up, and see whether they have any artillery worth talking about."

The gunners, nothing loth, gallop off to a favourable height within some 4,000 yards of the enemy's position, and at this range open fire. They see us, but not quite soon enough; and we have pitched a dozen shells into them before they can reply. But they do reply, and to some effect. Did you see that flash? It was 8,000 yards from here. And see! The shell drops within a hundred yards of us. That gun was cast at Essen, by the ingenious Krupp, and it is too heavy for us to tackle. Gad! There's another from the left. Oh! This will never do. Pitch it into them, boys, as long as you can, and draw their fire. More we cannot do to-day. It is quite hopeless to expect us with our light field-guns to capture a position held by siege artillery. Some of the *Tartars* will have to come up here and talk to them with a 4·7; these toys of ours are not in it.

Lord Dundonald saw at once that his original plan of campaign could not be carried out. The Boer force occupying Colenso was obviously no mere party of raiders. It was a large force that had come to stay. It held a strong position, naturally formidable for defensive purposes, and rendered still more difficult by art. On the forts that we ourselves had constructed heavy Transvaal guns were now mounted; and it was plain that the enemy was doing its best to make the Tugela at Colenso a point at which it should be almost impossible for the Ladysmith Relief Column to pass.

The plans of the Boer commandant now developed themselves. He had made up his mind to take Ladysmith by bombardment and hunger; and, to give himself the time necessary to starve out Sir George White and his garrison, he had fortified every yard of the hilly country between the besieged



THE COUNTRY ROUND COLENSO.

town and Colenso. The extreme mobility of his force, and the facility with which he could move his position-guns from point to point even in the most difficult of country, would enable him to concentrate upon any given spot the whole of his forces. The same extraordinary mobility would enable him to defeat any attempt to outflank him ; and he calculated on being able, in a country so eminently suited to the Boer style of fighting, to hold back Buller until White and his army had been compelled to capitulate.

It is a matter of history how General Joubert failed. It is also a matter of history how nearly he succeeded. How he kept Buller on the Tugela for months. How, when our army pressed forward in the front, the Boers fought every inch. And how every hillock was fortified. How, when Warren tried to hit them in flank, he speedily found that their flank of yesterday was their front to-day. How at last, unable to outmanœuvre his foe, Buller drove him back by sheer, dogged, straightforward strokes—bayonet work and little else. How White and his garrison held on until they looked like an army of skeletons and scarecrows. But it is to this day a matter of doubt whether Ladysmith would have been relieved at all, despite the heroism of its defenders, despite the equally heroic conduct of Buller's column, had not Lord Roberts put fear into the hearts of the Free Staters by his masterly activity and success in another part of the theatre of war.

This is, perhaps, going ahead of the story a little. But it is necessary for the right understanding of the campaign in Natal for the reader to realise the plans of the Boer generals and upon what they were based.

Buller arrived in Frere camp on the 1st of December. He had before him some ten miles of fairly open country—not even then open in the sense in which Essex or Devon would be considered open, but open by comparison with the ground further north. His natural advanced camp would be Chieveley, only about four miles by rail from Colenso. From here he would have to make his attempt. From Colenso to Ladysmith there was a direct road running with the railway ; and the shortest route was undoubtedly this one—namely, along the rail from Chieveley, capturing Colenso, fording the river or bridging it where the railway bridge was, then onward north and slightly east, curving round to the beleaguered town. The Tugela river runs roughly speaking, east and west, but it is a serpentine stream, and at Colenso runs about three miles north to south, thus affording additional protection to the left of a defending force.

But the position had this natural disadvantage for a defending force, that on the Chieveley side of the river are hills, the chief of them Hlangwane Hill (p. 296), which, if captured by the attacking force, would enable the latter, without crossing the river, to command the opposite bank, and to shell from the flank the trenches north of Colenso Bridge.* Once over the Tugela, the march would be across country of the hilliest kind — kopje after kopje, ridge succeeding ridge. And eventually the column would come out on the east of Ladysmith, having first to carry or turn

* This was the route ultimately taken ; and it was at once made feasible when the British took the hills alluded to. The real fault in Buller's first attack was that he did not grasp the fact that these hills were the key of the position. He ought to have made his main attack there. When he did so ten weeks later the Boers had to evacuate Colenso, because the British commanded their left flank.

the formidable Isimbulwhana, a mountain 4,000 feet in height.

Another possible route from Chieveley was by making a wide detour, striking across to the west and slightly north for nearly twenty miles, and then sweeping round by the right to the north, across the Little Tugela at Springfield, over Spearman's Hill, across the Tugela at Potgieter's Drift, and then north and slightly east until the road from Harrismith to Ladysmith, *via* Oliver's Hoek, was struck, and then east and slightly north, striking in at about Rifleman's Range. This was a somewhat easier road than the other, except for lack of water. It was, however, very much longer, involving about three times the length of route ; and, unlike the straight road *via* Colenso, Pieters, and Nelthorpe, it had no railway anywhere near. At the same time, the Potgieter's Drift route had this to recommend it: that when once the position hard by the river had been forced, the ground was easier than the country due north of Colenso.

There were other routes possible, but General Buller, after careful consideration, resolved to risk a direct attack on Colenso —to hit the enemy in front and smash him. There was some chance, too, he thought, in this case of obtaining assistance from White, who had a very fair force of cavalry in Ladysmith, and would do his best to dash out upon the enemy's rear at the proper moment. It ought to be said, in justice to all concerned, that our officers knew little or nothing of the country between Colenso and Ladysmith. They were aware, in a general sort of way, that it was hilly and difficult ; but, incredible as it may seem, there was not in the possession of the War Office any detailed or reliable survey map of this bit of country, for the only part of Natal that had been surveyed with an eye to military operations was the part north of Ladysmith, which seems to show what was in the minds of the military authorities before the war broke out.

The Tugela and the country north of it was held by a Boer force, variously estimated at from 8,000 to 13,000. Buller had with him at Frere Camp, Estcourt, and Mooi River 12,500 at the beginning of December, and levies of mounted men were being raised hourly. Moreover, the home Government was hurrying out of Liverpool and Southampton, the Thames and the Clyde, both infantry, cavalry, guns and gunners.

Although Ladysmith was over twenty miles from Frere, and the telegraph had been cut and the town was closely invested, Hildyard had managed to open up communication with the garrison both by night and day. In the daytime, dots and dashes were flashed across from garrison to camp, and from camp to garrison. The relieving column possessed the orthodox heliograph. This apparatus was lacking in Ladysmith ; but an officer who owned a splendid shaving-glass managed to construct a very excellent makeshift with which to reply to the words of cheer and encouragement transmitted from the other side of the Tugela. The worst of it was that no code had been arranged, so that it was almost impossible for any confidential messages to be sent in this way. For the Boers had amongst them heliographers who understood the dots and dashes as well as we did. They had a pretty wit, too, some of them, and used to wake up our heliographers with dot, dot, dash, dot, and so on, which, being duly spelled out, would be found to be a greeting from Bulwhana Mountain, inquiring "How do you like Long Tom?" To which little pleasantry our men would reply, "We

like him so much that we mean to have him for our own."

By night the Relief Force could still signal to the besieged. But this time the dots and dashes were transmitted not by the sun's rays, but by the agency of a powerful electric searchlight shooting its beams for many miles and recording its dots and its dashes against the sky.

All was bustle in Frere Camp in those early days of December; for General Buller had decided to smite the enemy speedily, and to hit him hard. Ladysmith was to be relieved ere Christmas Day. The turmoil and stir in the camp were tremendous. The battalions from Estcourt and Mooi River moved up. More men in khaki came up, as the natives had it, "out of the sea." The lines of tents grew and grew to the dimensions of a considerable town, until, on the 10th of the month, the Ladysmith relief column mustered 22,000 men. Like Methuen, General Buller tried to render his forces invisible. Every cannon, every bayonet, every button, had to be painted with khaki paint or rubbed with brown earth. Even the horses had to submit to chemical treatment, until there was not a single grey in a single squadron or battery. If there was a weak spot in the array it consisted in the lack of cavalry and heavy guns. There were four brigades of infantry, of four battalions each—nearly, that is; for the Dublins were not at full strength by any means. There was a cavalry and mounted infantry brigade—two regiments of cavalry, the rest mostly Colonial levies; in all, some 2,700 men. The Royal Artillery was represented by five field batteries. And H.M.S. *Terrible* had contributed two 4·7 pieces and fourteen 12-pounders. These guns were served by a naval contingent drawn chiefly from the *Terrible*, but also reinforced by bluejackets from the *Forte*, *Philomel*, and *Tartar*. These weapons were our only pieces with which we might reply to the heavy metal of the Krupps and Creusots.

The whole force was in splendid health and condition, well fed, and in fine fighting trim; eager, moreover, to a man to come to grips with the enemy. On the whole, there was but one fear in the camp—which was that the Dutchmen would not fight at all, but would bolt before we could catch them. Thus matters stood on the 13th of December, 1899.

CHAPTER XXVI.

COLENSO.

THE 15th of December, 1899, was a memorable day in the history of the war — a day of heroic deeds and a ghastly failure, of fierce attack and stubborn defence, of death and wounds, of glory and sadness: the worst disaster to the British arms since the Zulu impis overwhelmed the camp at Isandhlwana. It was a disaster to try the temper of a proud people, the courage of a brave army. For the spirit of a nation and the calibre of its fighting line is best seen in the hour of danger, disaster, and defeat. And it is rather by the way in which it faces these ordeals than by any other test that the quality of a race and its fitness to survive are made manifest.

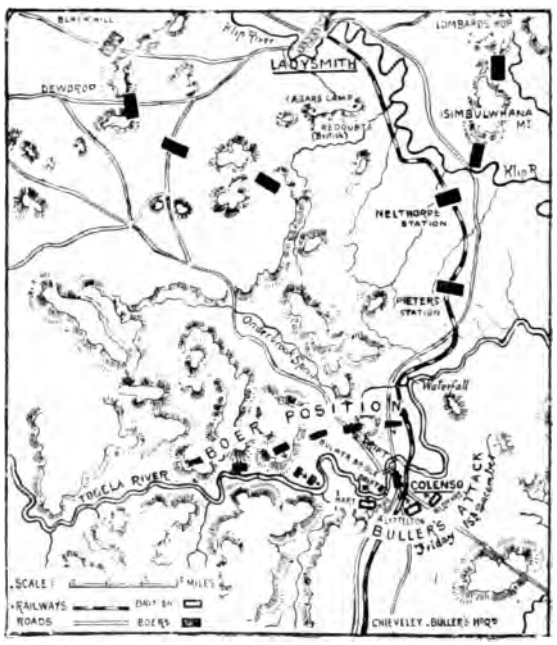
Sir Redvers Buller, commanding the army of the Empire in Natal, resolved, during the second week of December, to strike and shatter the Boer commandoes barring the road to beleaguered Ladysmith. On Tuesday, the 12th, he put his forces in motion, sending out the Sixth, or Fusilier Brigade, under General Barton, to occupy a kopje three miles to the south of Colenso. A finer body of troops than Barton's Brigade it would be impossible to place in the field. It was composed of battalions representing the four countries of the Union—to wit, the Royal, Irish, Scots, and Welsh Fusiliers. Two 4·7's and six naval 12-pounders accompanied the brigade. The two big naval guns were drawn by teams of oxen, numbering twenty-eight to the team, and the 12-pounders were transported in similar style, but, being lighter, required less ox-power to draw them. All the weapons had been mounted on the carriages devised on the spur of the moment by Captain Percy Scott, and were manned by bluejackets.

Starting out at dawn of day, Barton's Brigade reached their position unopposed late on Tuesday afternoon; and before eight o'clock on the morning of Wednesday, the 13th, the sailors had begun the fray. Mounting their battery on the kopje, they began to search the Boer trenches with lyddite, throwing the shells over the town of Colenso, over the River Tugela, into a row of kopjes directly north of the town. If it was intended that this cannonade should discover the positions of the Boer artillery, it failed in its object; for though lyddite was pumped across the river at a terrific rate from half-past seven in the morning until 1.30 p.m., not a shell was fired in reply. It was not because the bluejackets failed to reach the mark. They found trench after trench, fortification after fortification, even at 4½ miles. The Boers troubled not to answer. Instead, as soon as ever an entrenchment was found by our men they got up and left it, retiring to other positions in their rear. Not all our shells burst; for wherever the ground was soft, the detonators failed to act.

While the men of the Royal Navy were thus having the fun all to themselves,

BULLER STANDING ON THE MOUND BY THE GUNS (*p.* 306)

watched with great admiration by the Fusiliers, the rest of Buller's force was putting itself on the move. The order to strike tents came immediately after daylight, and the whole force moved that day to Chieveley, halfway to Colenso. This was on the 14th. They arrived and pitched the camp at Chieveley at about noon. All that day the Naval Brigade was doing its best to break up the enemy's entrenchments, and it speedily became noised abroad throughout the camp that on the next morning the army would go forward to try conclusions with the invaders of the colony. That night Lieutenant-General Clery issued the orders for the movement.



PLAN OF THE BATTLE OF COLENSO.

He began by announcing his intention of forcing a passage of the Tugela next day. The attack was to be delivered chiefly by two brigades, namely, Hart's on the left and Hildyard's in the centre. Lord Dundonald's mounted brigade was to attack on the right, endeavouring to take Hlangwane Kop. Hlangwane was a high eminence on the right, and on our side of the river, being, that is to say, on the east side of the Tugela, where that eccentric stream runs north and south. If Dundonald could take the hill, he was to hold it, and direct a hot rifle fire towards the centre, enfilading the Boer position north of the bridge; thus rendering assistance to Hildyard in his central attack.

Hart had with him the Dublin and Inniskilling Fusiliers, doomed, alas, to water with life's blood every kop and kopje between the Tugela and Pieters Hill; the Connaught Rangers, another historic regiment; and the Borderers, men of the dales and lakes upon which Skiddaw and Scafell frown. These formed the Fifth Brigade. Buller had selected them to make the longest march of any because, he said, the Irishmen would fight as well after a long march as at any other time. Hart's Brigade was to march towards Bridle Drift, four miles west of Colenso, on the left of Buller's line, and attack the enemy's right flank. After forcing a passage at the drift, the brigade was to advance along the bank of the river towards the centre—that is, towards the railway bridge, which formed Hildyard's objective. They would be exposed to the fire of Boer field artillery on Grobler's Kloof and Red Hill, where, as it afterwards turned out, there were also some heavy guns of very long range. These guns commanded Bridle Drift

The centre attack was in the hands of Hildyard, commanding the Second Brigade, a fine force, which we may call the purely English brigade, composed of Queen's (West Surreys), West Yorkshires, Devonshires and East Surreys, one battalion from each regiment. Hildyard's orders were to carry Colenso and force the river by way of the iron bridge. This bridge was commanded by a row of kopjes close to the river, strongly fortified, and occupied by riflemen ; and the attack was also liable to be raked by the Boer guns mounted on Fort Wylie, which dominated Colenso and the bridge from the north bank.

Thus the attack was provided for. Hart on the left, Dundonald on the right, Hildyard in the centre. This left the commander with two more brigades of infantry to act as supports. General Lyttleton's, the Fourth, consisting of the 1st Rifle Brigade, the 3rd King's Royal Rifles, the Scottish Rifles, and the Durham Light Infantry, was posted between Hart and Hildyard—that is, on the left centre. Barton's force, the Sixth Brigade, was to be on the right centre, between Hildyard and Dundonald. It numbered, like the other infantry brigades, four battalions—the Union Brigade of Fusiliers, which had been the first to move out of Frere camp.

As for the artillery, it was thus divided : the 63rd and 64th Field Batteries R.A. were to support Hart on the outside of his left—shelling with shrapnel the Boer positions on Red Hill and Grobler's Kloof, with intent to occupy the attention of, and if possible to silence the guns there. One naval battery was placed behind Hildyard in the centre. Here were the two 4·7 guns and four 12-pounders, under Captain Jones, of H.M.S. *Forte*, mounted on a hill. Seeing that Hildyard had to face the fire from Fort Wylie, and that his attack was on the centre, Colonel Long, R.A., was to support him with two field batteries (14th and 66th) and half a dozen naval guns under Lieutenant Ogilvy, of H.M.S. *Terrible*. Ogilvy was a very promising officer, who had frequently longed for active service, but had "never had any luck," as they say of a man in the Army or Navy when the unfortunate wretch has had no opportunities of being shot. Still, he had always been regarded as a likely man : one who would do something if he ever got the chance. Nor were expectations disappointed ; for Ogilvy ended as a commander the campaign he had begun as a lieutenant. And he deserved it.

The 7th Field Battery, detached from Colonel Long's command, was sent off on the right with Dundonald.

The general idea of the officer commanding, his plan of battle, was this. Hart and Hildyard would try to rush the river on the left and in the centre. If Hart appeared the more likely to succeed —that is, if he effected a crossing or the enemy opposing him seemed less strong than in the centre, Lyttleton, between Hildyard and Hart, would move to support Hart. Otherwise, he would support Hildyard's attack on the bridge. Barton, on Hildyard's other hand, had somewhat similar orders. If Dundonald thought he had a good chance of success on the right, Barton could help him with one or more battalions of his brigade. If not, the Fusilier Brigade was to support Hildyard.

It would, in fact, appear that General Buller thought his best chance to lie in an attack right straight ahead, on Colenso and the highway bridge ; and to that end most of the artillery was ordered to direct its fire on the kopjes and fort (Wylie) north of the bridge. Colonel Long's batteries were to proceed *en masse*

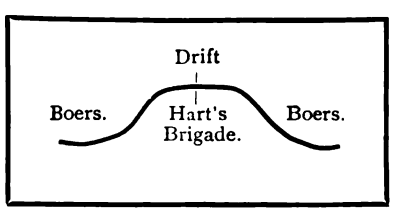
—protected, of course, by infantry—to Hildyard's right; and to enfilade the kopjes north of the bridge; that is, to fire on them, not from the direct front, but across. Like the rest of the plan, this was for the purpose of smashing the Boers in the centre, and clearing a way to Ladysmith by the direct road along the railway.

On page 302 will be found a rough sketch of the disposition of the forces, which will explain to the reader the plan of attack far better than many words. And thus the army of Natal moved out at dawn on the fateful morning of December 15th. All arms were jubilant and confident, all desirous of getting at the enemy, all supremely convinced of their ability to smash his army to pieces.

Now let us look at the Boer position—a bird's eye view from our balloon. The bridge is the centre of it, in the middle of a semi-circle surrounded by hills, at a distance of about four and a-half miles, these hills being about 1,400 feet above the level of the bridge. Inside this huge semi-circle are smaller hills, or kopjes. Four of them are quite near the bridge, being, in General Buller's words, "small, lozenge-shaped, steep-sided, hog-backed, each, as it is further from the river, being higher and longer than the next inner one." The one nearest to the bridge was fortified by the Durban Volunteers in early October, and is known as Fort Wylie, the fortification from which the Dublin Fusiliers rescued the Colonial contingent when our troops evacuated Colenso. On every crest of this hill there is a stone wall, frequently as many as three rising one behind the other, so that if the lowest is carried the enemy can retreat behind the next one higher up. Altogether a wonderfully strong place for defence by riflemen; and further rendered difficult by the fact that heavy guns had been mounted there by the Transvaalers. Such was the position upon which Hildyard was to advance.

A characteristic thing happened. A certain Irish-American called Blake was fighting on the side of the Republics, having under his command a body called by themselves the Transvaal Irish Brigade. In fact, the only "Irish" amongst them were Irish-Americans. These people managed to send, per a Kaffir messenger, a note to the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, stating that they were anxious to meet the Dublin boys, and that when the meeting took place, they (the T.I.B.) would wipe them (the R.D.F.) off the face of the earth. To which a polite note was sent in reply, wherein the Dublins remarked that they, too, were anxious for a meeting, and that they would go through the T.I.B. "as the devil went through Athlone!" It promised to be an affair of the Kilkenny cats.

Bridle Drift, where Hart was to try to effect a crossing, was in a bend of the stream. On the opposite bank were rifle-pits and trenches, and some pretty dense scrub affording admirable concealment for riflemen. Behind were kopjes held by riflemen, and behind these again were some of the high hills forming the semi-circle before alluded to. It would in some ways be easier for Hart to cross than for Hildyard: because the Boer position at the Drift was not so strong as that opposite Colenso Bridge. On the other hand, the brigade must be exposed to a cross-fire—thus:



THE HEROES OF THE GUNS.

It is difficult to say with precision the numbers of Boer troops assembled to dispute the passage of the Tugela with Buller; but it is safe to say that General Joubert had at least 30,000 men round Ladysmith, and between that town and Colenso. And it is certain that he withdrew from the town every man except a few thousands as a "containing" force. He must have had over 8,000 men at his disposal when, at dawn of day, Hart's Brigade moved out of Chieveley Camp.

At 4.45 a.m., the brigades being then on the move to take up their positions, the naval guns in the centre—Captain Jones's battery—started operations. The cannonade was not at first very vigorous, and the shells were directed upon Fort Wylie; but by 5.30 the sailors were pumping lyddite across the river so fast that a shell seemed to drop every second. Sir Redvers Buller, standing on the mound by the guns, could see clouds of dust rise time and time again from Fort Wylie, proving that the range was good; and every now and then a piece of one of the walls on that hill would be blown out. The Boers sat sullen and silent. Faster and faster rained the lyddite. Still the same ominous quietness on the other side of the stream.

The bluejackets slewed round their guns and hurled missiles on Grobler's Kloof. Forty or fifty shells a minute they pitched on that eminence. Still no word of answer. Our Jacks did not like it. They knew full well the enemy was there. Why did he not, if only out of politeness, drop us a shell or two? But he did not. And, if the truth must be told, he kept quiet because he knew a trick worth two of ours. We should have replied; exposed the position of our pieces; and become engaged in a long-range artillery duel. Not so the Boer. He saved himself for our infantry.

Meanwhile Hart advances on the left, and, with his men in close formation, enters the loop formed by the river. The Dublins had the post of honour, leading the van as they had good right to do. For had they not shed more blood than any other regiment in the war hitherto. Next came the Connaught Rangers.

The whole brigade had advanced in quarter column—the best formation for keeping touch, no doubt, but impossible, in these days of magazine rifles, for fighting, because quarter column means very close formation, each battalion presenting an almost solid mass with a narrow front. When entering the loop the order was given to the Dublins to deploy—that is, to spread out in line, in open order. Scarce had the command been uttered, and before it could be carried out, the banks of the river burst into a blaze. A deafening roar broke out from Grobler's Kloof, a second from Red Hill, and a third from a lower kopje near the river bank. The Dublins were so far advanced into the loop of the river that the Mauser fire raked them from east and west, as well as from their front, the north. Add to this a shell fire from north, north-west, and almost due west, then try to imagine the state of the Dublins' ranks.

These seasoned troops had faced the climbing of Talana. They had dared the fire of the Dutchmen's rifles many a time within the last two months, but not in quarter column. So terrible was the ordeal, so deadly the hail of lead, that one can only wonder how the brave Irishmen endured it. Many a battalion, with small blame, would have broken. Not so the Royal Dublin Fusiliers. True it is that, caught in the inception of the manœuvre

of opening out from quarter-column into line, they fell into a momentary confusion. That was unavoidable. But not for a moment was the regiment shaken or dismayed.

They started to deploy at the "double." "What's this doubling for?" yelled Hart. "Quick!" And the run was changed to a walk. A curious piece of martinetism, but intended, one would suppose, to steady the troops.

The Connaughts, seeing the misfortune of the leading battalion, deployed a little earlier, and, with proud confidence and the precision of perfect discipline, moved forward in line, in extended order. They became the leading battalion; and they went into battle the more blithely for that they led the van. A terrible hail of shrapnel greeted them as they advanced, and down went many a likely boy. Here's one. It was his first fight. Like the thoroughbred Irishman that he was, he had been looking forward to it for weeks. Now he lies there, his rifle clean, his bayonet in its sheath. He has not fired a shot or struck a blow. The piece of metal that laid him low came from three miles away. It is hard to be killed without striking a blow. How much harder is it when you cannot see your enemy! Here is another. He seems to be the centre of the cross-fire. Eight bullets have hit him already; but he goes on. More strike him, and not until the thirteenth wound does Private King sink to the ground, a dreadful sight but still alive.

The Dublins have now completely recovered themselves, and think of nothing but of getting at the enemy. They want to go through Blake's Brigade even as they promised to do. The whole brigade edges off a little to the west, and now deploys for the battle; the Rangers, the Borderers, the Dublins, and the Inniskillings in extended order, the Dublins and Connaughts in the firing line, the other two battalions as supports. The Field Artillery is of little use here. It is vastly outranged by the 94-pounder on Grobler's Kloof and the 40-pounder on the Red Hill. These it cannot reach, much less silence; and when the two batteries turn their guns for a moment on the river banks, they fail to make the slightest impression on the volume of the enemy's rifle-fire.

Down on the banks, straining to reach the Drift, tear the valiant Rangers and the dashing Dublins. "Steady!" is the word. They work their way onward, though how any man can live in that fire is nothing short of a miracle. They lie down and open at six hundred yards' range, and the Dublins that day prove themselves as good shots as any commando from north of the Vaal. Onward they press. It is wonderful. There are other regiments in the British army with pluck and courage and steadfast endurance. But no other could have surpassed the Dublins that day. They did not merely stand up to it. They took the punishment with laughter. They shouted rough jibe and jest across the river, "We're coming!"

And it was no idle boast. They pressed on, though one in every three was streaming blood. And so, yard by yard, foot by foot, they drove the Boers back by their rifle-fire. Some of the Boers had constructed trenches on the south bank, and here the Dublins dyed their bayonets. Until at last Bridle Drift was reached.

The Inniskillings, not to be repressed, declined to hold themselves in reserve. They were the supports. "And, begorra," they said sturdily, "we'll support thim

[illegible] in the firing line!" Wherefore they marched forward with fury and joined the first line of attack. And it needed all the powers of discipline to restrain the Border Regiment from following suit.

Now to cross the Drift. In the deepest part, so the information goes, it is no more than four feet. So the Dublin boys wade boldly in. The first one or two get into the water safely enough, but then Mauser bullets spit on the taking-off place, and men drop fast. Forward! Sons of Erin! Forward! The water is getting deeper and deeper. Suddenly the leading man finds himself out of his depth. He flounders. "He's drowning! Seize him!" And the next three form a chain and drag the man out. Back they go to the south bank. The wily Boers, knowing full well that our men would be likely to try the drift, have dammed the stream lower down, so the water is seven feet deep.

Then a cry arises. "Let's swim it!"

There is no order now. There are no orders. Dublins and Inniskillings, Connaughts and Borderers rush into the stream, and amongst the foremost is a little lad, a drummer named Dunn, who has been acting as bugler for the Dublins. He had the honour to be first wounded in the battle, and his right arm hangs limp by his side. He drops his bugle and does not stop to pick it up; but runs through the fire straight for the river bank, and in a minute is into the water. Months afterwards the Queen herself sends for him, and talks to him, and makes him the proudest, happiest bugler in the Army by giving him another bugle with her own Royal hands.

"A FEW ACCOMPLISH THE IMPOSSIBLE."

There are some rocks in the stream at intervals, and the Dublins and Inniskillings, with vengeance in their hearts, swim from rock to rock. Any risk, any danger, to reach the northern bank. They did not feel the weight of rifle and ammunition; they only thought of getting at the enemy. Some who could not swim tried to dash through the river; and these the current overwhelmed. The water splashed and foamed as thousands of bullets pattered into it. One infantryman — his name is not mentioned, but he was of the Irish—reached a rock near the opposite bank and pulled himself up on it to rest ere he made the final plunge. Ten score rifles bark, and the dauntless Irishman toppled, a shattered corpse, into the river. But still the others pressed on.

Comrades line the south bank and blaze away to cover the crossing; but the Boers are so artfully concealed in trenches and behind breastworks that it is almost impossible to get a sight of one. More furious Irishmen plunge into the water and swim to meet the foe. Here a man is drowned, there a man is shot. One after another comes within a few yards of the north bank only to be almost blown to pieces by a hurricane of lead. But there is no turning back, no giving way. They have been ordered to effect a crossing at Bridle Drift; and although there is no drift, cross the river they will, if they spend nine-tenths of their force. It is murder, nothing less than murder, to ask these magnificent battalions to cross an unfordable river held by a well armed enemy whom they cannot see, much less strike at. With superior artillery it might be possible. Without the protection of big guns, it is a mere useless waste of blood and courage.

Still, a few accomplish the impossible. One tiny band at last finds itself on the northern bank. And what does it see? It sees row upon row of trenches; and in front a network of barbed wire, and beyond great cannon vomiting shrapnel. The only officer who has crossed is a sergeant of the Dublins, and he at once assumes command. His orders are brief. "Fix your knifes, bhoys! Let's make a name for ourselves." A wild Hurroo! Erin's battle cry breaks from the lips of the little knot of heroes. The words stir their warm Irish blood. What care they for death or wounds. They will make a name for themselves. They will write it red in the best blood of the burghers. There is a trench full of Boers a little way along the bank. Perchance some of Blake's legion are in it. "Charge!" And like a whirlwind the Irishmen rush upon the trench. So terrible is their onslaught, so wild and fierce their battle-cry, that the riflemen in the trench seem paralysed. Their fire becomes hurried and aimless; and ere they can recover nerve and confidence a score of fighting, tearing devils, some bareheaded, all dripping blood and water, hurl themselves into the entrenchment.

This is the moment of moments. For this the little band have swum the river of blood. For this they have suffered the wounds and death of friends and comrades. They glut themselves with carnage. Thrust! And the fell steel crashes through and through the breastbone. One runs; but a figure flies through the air after him. It is a Dublin Fusilier with rifle and bayonet held at the charge; and the Boer with one shriek falls on his face, the blood streaming from holes in back and front. How many men were in that trench is not known. The Dublins could not stop to count; and the Boer returns were never accurate. But it is certain

that not a single man of them was left alive.

Buller, standing by the central naval battery, watches through his spyglass the wonderful fight of the Irishmen. He sees how they are outnumbered. He recognises now the almost impregnable position of the enemy. He notes how that the field batteries, the only artillery on the left, cannot raise a bark in answer to the heavy artillery on the outside right of the enemy's position. So he orders Hart to retire. The whole brigade is furious. The soldiers see for themselves the difficulties of their task ; but to them the more insuperable the difficulties the greater the odds ; the more formidable the foe, so much the greater the glory of the victory. They think, for it is the belief in which they have been trained since first they donned the Queen's uniform, that if they only keep pegging at it they will be certain to attain their object.

Wherefore, when the bugle wails out the Retire, they curse as one man. They do not mind being killed. They will swim rivers in face of a rifle-fire such as the world has never seen. They will do anything, suffer anything, and that cheerfully. Except one thing. And that is Failure. "We cud ha' carried the —— river, if they'd let us ! An' now the whole bally army will say that we funked ! "

But discipline, the teaching and training of years, prevails over the fighting instinct that says "Forward." It is, however, impossible for the brigade to retire without support. It has pressed so far forward, so near to the Boer guns and Mausers, that it will be wiped out if it retires without having somebody to hold the enemy in check the while. The men, save that handful across the river, are under some sort of cover, whence they continue to empty their magazines into the nearest Boer entrenchments. Once they move out of that cover that will have to re-cross the ground they have so hardly won exposed to the full fury of the Dutchman's fire.

Buller, seeing this, sends Lyttleton, with half his brigade, to cover the retirement of the Irishmen ; and the King's Royal Rifles, with the Rifle Brigade, swing out in open order to a point whence they can fire upon the trenches commanding the Drift. Thus the left wing retires, halting and facing round and blazing away angrily, what time the Rifle battalions keep up a long, continuous fire across the stream. Scarce do the brave Irishmen reach the open ground a little way back from the river bank, when they are deluged with shot and shell. Now men fall fast indeed. The attack was bad enough : this is fifty times worse. Men drop not singly but in dozens. Comrades raise them and carry them as best they can. For two hours the retreat lasts, and then all is over. The attack has failed ; the Irish battalions have spent their blood and strength in vain. But, still undaunted, they only speak of the "next time."

Confident, every man of them, that had they been allowed to persevere they would have won the fight, they feel undefeated. Undefeated, though dragged back. And they long for the day when next the general shall fling them on the enemy's ranks.

Bravest of the brave ! Weeks of weary marching, weeks of hard fighting are to be yours. But at last you shall win. And Her Gracious Majesty, whose loyal servants you are, shall dub you "her brave Irish soldiers," and she and the nation, the Empire, shall take counsel to do you honour.

While the fight was waging on the left

of the battle, Dundonald at other extreme was hard pressed. He had but 1,000 men, cavalry and mounted volunteers, and one field battery. He might have done something by a sudden dash in the grey of the early morning, but he has far to march, and by the time he reaches Hlangwane Hill he finds the ubiquitous Boers entrenched there with heavy guns mounted. The Colonials fought like men. The cavalry could not assist them much. Barton's Fusilier Brigade was wanted elsewhere, as we shall shortly relate; but the Natalians and Outlanders, Thorneycroft's men and the Imperials, every man of that force proved himself as good a soldier and as brave a fighting man as any who had made arms his trade.

Hlangwane Hill was a long, high eminence. Rocky and boulder-strewn, so steep in places and so difficult that men had to crawl on hands and knees, to hold on to rocks while climbing. A large force of Boer riflemen, in a position such as they loved to defend, stood at the top, invisible but deadly, pouring shell and bullets down the slope.

This position the Volunteers were ordered to storm.

They rode up to it, or as near as they could get; then halted, dismounted, led their horses to the shelter of a friendly kloof or cleft, and swarmed to the attack. They did not disdain cover as, perhaps, our regular infantry would have done. They made no fierce rushes such as the Irishmen delight in. But in their own quiet way they were effective. They showed the Dutchmen that they, too, could make themselves nearly invisible. For hours they crept and crawled. Sometimes for half an hour not an inch would be gained. Every man, concealing himself behind a stone, fired at the top of the hill; and so deadly accurate was the marksmanship that soon the defenders dared hardly show the brim of a hat or the tip of an elbow. Then, like so many brown snakes, the storming party would glide along and up, every man taking care to move so as to show the smallest possible part of him.

It was a terribly long job, but it was the only business-like way of accomplishing the task. And so successful was the method employed that at last the gallant volunteers reached a ridge nearly at the top of the hill. A few volleys, half an hour or so of continuous and careful musketry, a final British rush, and Hlangwane would be the prize of the Colonials. Then they could enfilade the Boer centre, rake the trenches opposite Colenso Bridge, and so make the way easier for Hildyard. Already the defenders were becoming daunted. Nothing they could do seemed able to check the attack. They made preparation for retreat.

When an order came—"Retire!" it was hard, terribly hard. Victory was well within sight—and then "Retire!" There was nothing for it but to obey, however; and the bold band of stormers came down the hill that was so nearly theirs. The Boers on the top, relieved and overjoyed, lined the trenches once more and pursued the retreating foe with a pitiless hail, whereby the mounted infantry lost more men by far than they had lost in the advance.

Joining Dundonald at the foot of the hill, the troopers were once more commanded to mount. Troops of the enemy were advancing, and soon the mounted brigade, less than 1,000 strong now, found itself engaged in a fierce encounter with a force numbering more than twice as many as they. This was the one part of the field where the Boers attacked. It was the one

part of the field where they were beaten. Dundonald had with him some machine-guns, and with these he played upon the foe.

The Mounted Infantry used their rifles with the steadiness of veteran soldiers, the effect of sportsmen. Once or twice the cavalry rode down upon the enemy. But the enemy never awaited the charge. Cold steel they could not face, whether lance or bayonet ; and whenever the Hussars dashed at them they bolted to higher, rougher ground, where the horsemen could not follow.

There is little to record of this part of the battle. It was a succession of advances on the part of the Boers, advances in loose order after their best manner, taking every inch of cover, and with rifles continually firing. These advances were always repulsed, and the Boers driven back. But Dundonald did not take the hill he had been sent to take, nor render the assistance it was hoped he would render to Hildyard's central attack. Indeed, he had his hands quite full on his own account, and did good enough work when he prevented the Boer left from brushing him aside and turning our right. For nine hours or so the fight raged fiercely here, with equal fortune.

And now to glance at the central battle, where Hildyard, supported by the heavy naval guns and by the main body of field artillery, was endeavouring to capture Colenso and force the bridge there.

Hildyard set out at 4 a.m. from Chieveley Camp with the English (2nd) brigade of infantry. And it was a sight to make the coldest heart beat fast, the calmest eye fire with pride and martial ardour, as with steady swing the Queen's West Surreys and the Devons, followed by the West Yorkshires and East Surreys, tramped out. With the punctiliousness of a proud people, the battalions advanced in perfect order—ten paces between the files, the Devons and East Surreys on one side of the line of railway, and the West Surreys and West Yorks on the other side.

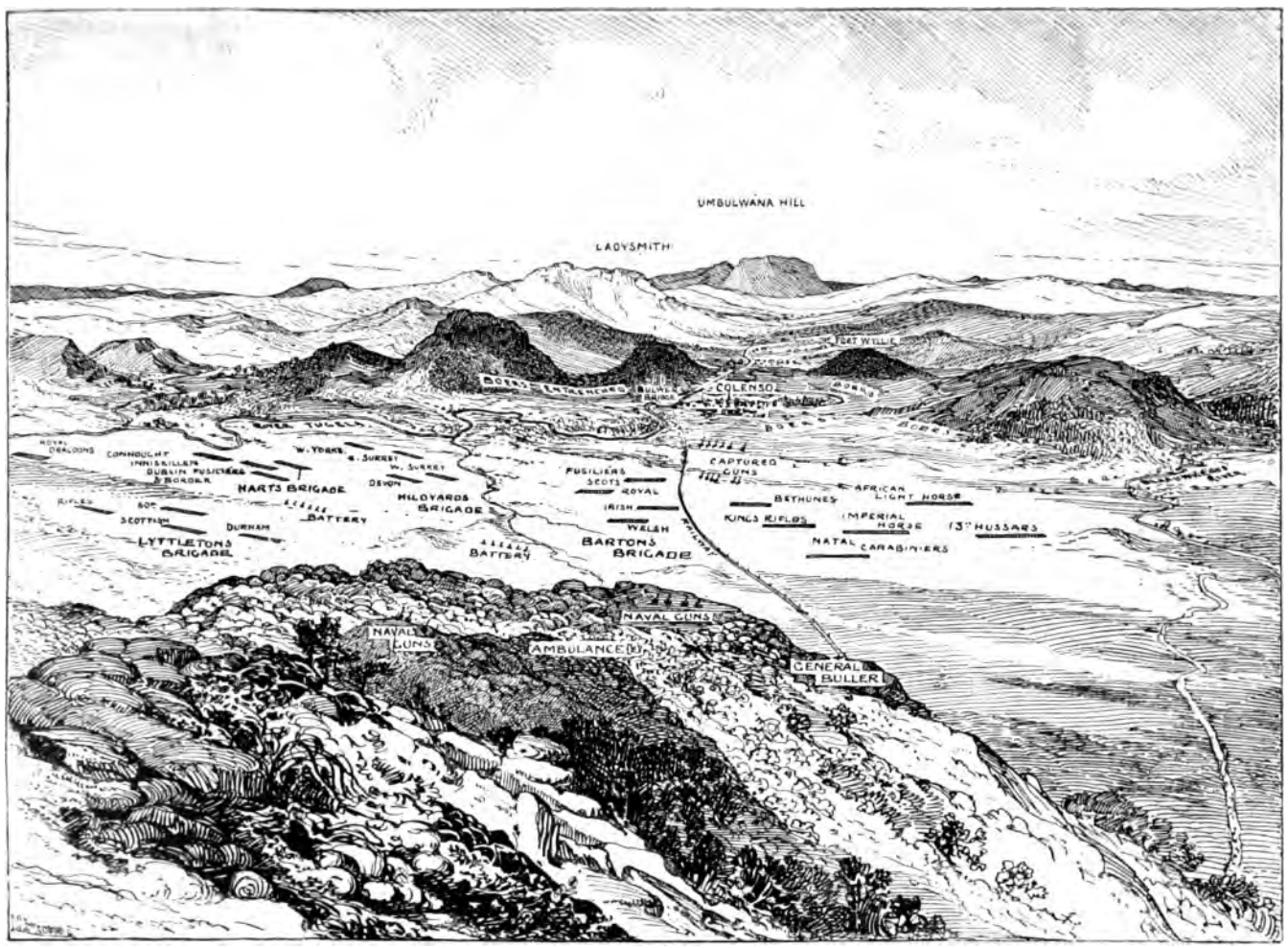
It was a sight never to be forgotten by those who witnessed it. Unlike the Irishmen, who marched to the attack as to a festival, laughing and joking as only Pat can, the four English battalions—the Saxon element of the army of Natal—swung out with heads erect and eyes front, and with an expression of steadfast resolution most wonderful to behold. It seemed as though the Irishmen were fighting because they liked it, and for the glory of the deed : the Englishmen because it was their duty, and duty must be done.

The absence of excitement in the ranks, the coolness of the advance, were almost superhuman. And the Englishman who saw these four battalions from north and west and south of his country, ignorant, many of them, and many of them hardly out of their teens, wending their way into battle with quiet scorn of danger—the Englishman who could look upon this sight without thrilling in every fibre of his being with pride of race and country, deserves not to have such heroes for his countrymen, such heroism displayed on his behalf.

Never since the Black Watch walked over a French cavalry regiment at Quatre Bras have British troops marched into battle with such wonderful precision of formation.

And what had they to face—what to accomplish ?

In the first place, they must march straight on to Colenso and the Tugela, where, south of the bridge, are trenches and rifle-pits. They must face during



BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF THE BATTLE OF COLENSO.

their whole march the fire from the heavy guns on Fort Wylie and upon the kopjes immediately north of the bridge. And for more than a mile and a half they must face a still deadlier hail—the fire of thousands of rifles held by men invisible.

To lighten the formidable task, the naval gunners in the main battery (Jones's) began at about 5.30 a.m. to shell Fort Wylie in earnest. They had the range from the start, and shell after shell sailed into the fort; and time after time huge clouds of dust mingled with stones showed that the lyddite was exploding. But not a single answering shot was fired. The naval gunners turned their attention for a time to Grobler's Kloof and Red Hill, opposite Hart's Brigade, and dropped shell after shell into these positions. Meanwhile Hildyard's infantry, with Long's field batteries and Ogilvy's six naval 12-pounders, were marching straight on the river, the artillery being wide out to the right of the battalions.

Now the enemy's guns were heavy and of longer range than our field batteries, and Long resolved on a daring stroke. His orders were to march his own and the naval guns up together, for protection. But what he did was this: He selected a position close by the river bank, and within 1,200 yards (easy rifle range) of Fort Wylie; and here he resolved to plant his field guns and shell the trenches on that hill.

The idea was a daring one. The order was passed along the batteries, and, quick as lightning, the guns were in motion. The drivers of the field batteries plied whip and spur and galloped full speed to the position pointed out by their commander. Then the folly of it was seen. Ogilvy, with his oxen-drawn naval guns, could only crawl along, and in no wise keep up with the gallop of the field guns. He was left behind. The infantry escort, without which no field guns ought to move within rifle-range—even long rifle-range—being on foot, could not keep up. They, too, were left behind. And Colonel Long and Colonel Hunt and the field gunners and twelve guns went rattling and dashing along as straight and as fast as they could gallop for the river.

They reach it within about 300 yards, and gain the position they aimed at.

And then occurred the events which changed the fortunes of the day, which cost hundreds of British lives and millions of British treasure, which reduced the garrison of Ladysmith to living skeletons, and brought about a disaster to the British arms the greatest within two generations.

Long had gone too far. The banks of the Tugela, like the banks of most South African rivers, were steep and high; and not, as river banks in England usually are, almost level with the stream itself. And behind these steep banks there were riflemen entrenched. Never was there such a target. The guns halted at about 300 yards distance; and instantly a fire broke forth from the Mausers such as can only be called appalling. The battery horses stood stock still; for discipline in the British army extends even to the brute beasts. Almost as quickly as you can read these words the whole seventy-two were shot down.

Still the gunners were undaunted. The Hotchkiss guns and a Maxim-Nordenfeldt, and guns of heavy metal, with rifles from Fort Wylie, blazed upon them, showered shells of all kinds—shrapnel and common shell, percussion shells, and every kind of missile—while from the trenches there, and from the kopjes north of the bank—

and, worse than all, from the trenches on the south bank at point-blank range—Mauser bullets were vomited in one continuous stream. Still the gunners faltered not. Quickly they unlimbered, they loaded, they turned their guns upon the fort, and in splendid style showered shrapnel upon it.

The Boers had some good artillerists in their ranks; but they could not match this. The twelve field-guns, outranged, out-numbered, over-balanced by weight of metal, when every moment saw a gunner drop dead, yet spat out so vehement a fire that the guns on Fort Wylie were silenced for a time. One gunner was doing the work of two, then of three, then of five; but the volume of fire never slackened, nor was its accuracy less deadly. Taking the positions of the Boer guns from the flashes, our brave fellows hurled shrapnel at them until nobody could be found willing to expose himself to our fire.

Meanwhile Ogilvy's lumbering oxen were crawling along a mile in the rear.

The guns on the fort are silenced, but not the rifles; and now the batteries turn their attention to them. They cannot touch the fellows 300 yards away on the river-bank; and these continue to empty their magazines with furious rapidity into the gunners and drivers. With heroic intrepidity the 14th and 66th Batteries continue to shell the trenches on Fort Wylie, now silent but for the spit, spit, spit of the Mausers.

"No more ammunition!" It was the sad truth. The reserve ammunition was left behind when the mad rush forward was made; and the waggons cannot cross the zone of fire. They try, of course; but one might as well try to swim across the Falls of Niagara. No more ammunition! The gunners at Fort Wylie soon grasp the situation. They man their guns once more, and turn their undivided attention to Hildyard's infantry: what time the riflemen on the banks shoot down without pity the men of the 14th and 66th Batteries.

Ogilvy is lumbering up. He comes within range. He unlimbers just behind a donga, a quarter of a mile in the rear of Long. He opens fire with his twelve-pounders; and the seamen show the defenders of Fort Wylie that the battle is not yet over for them. The Boers answer viciously, but the lucky star of the Naval Brigade is in the ascendant. Indeed, Lieutenant Ogilvy must be under the special guardianship of some protecting angel; for, as he stands surveying the position, trying to spy out the best places to drop shells in, two shells from a quick-firer actually pass between his legs. He is standing, sailor-fashion, wide-legged, else he had shared poor Egerton's fate; but as it is he goes unscathed. All he is reported to have said is: "They seem to have got the range, don't they?" What an extraordinary person your sailor is, after all! And he is the same from cabin-boy to admiral. One great missile goes whizzing past the face of a seaman gunner, nearly knocking him down by the wind it makes. "Damned draughty place this is!" he remarks coolly: picks up his cap, and resumes operations.

But the twelve-pounder battery was unable to go right in to the assistance of the abandoned field batteries. Lieutenant Ogilvy made what haste he could; but you cannot hurry draught oxen. And pretty soon there were no draught oxen left to be hurried. As soon as Ogilvy unlimbered and got his guns a-going, the enemy's riflemen, machine-guns, and heavy artillery pounded him hotly. The curiously incessant noise

of the Hotchkiss guns, and the continuous rain of missiles from them, demoralised our native team-drivers, who turned tail and bolted as only do men who are running for life. This was pretty bad ; for a team of oxen requires a great deal of handling, and Jack's accomplishments did not include ox-driving. Any other mortal thing he could have done, but not that. The oxen, standing near the guns, came in for their share of bullets and shells ; and, left without their usual attendants, those which were not killed bolted.

Jack scratched his head and observed that this was a rum turn-out. "Howsomedever, since the bloomin' cows had 'ooked it, he supposed they'd 'ave to do without 'em." And he cheerfully set to work to pound Fort Wylie. And pound it he did to some tune. The shells flew into it at the rate of over twenty a minute.

The Boer gunners, who had resumed firing after our field batteries were silenced, very soon had enough of it. The 4·7in. guns under Captain Jones were dropping huge charges of lyddite—some into Fort Wylie, some into the kopjes south of it, then slewing round and belching destruction at Grobler's Kloof. But the 12-pounder battery on the right of the centre simply confined itself to pouring shells into Fort Wylie. They blew pieces of wall down ; they silenced, one by one, the Boer guns. One Krupp was blown up sky high, gunners and all ; and then, for the first time, the sailors got a little excited. It was, as you might say, an outward and visible sign that their efforts were not all being wasted.

It need hardly be added that the gunnery of the naval artillerists was the best possible. If, out of all the hundreds of shells pitched by them into the Boer positions, twenty missed the spot aimed at, it is an outside figure. One of the gunners was afterwards careful to explain that in a "turn-out" of this kind you couldn't miss, because the gun-platform is steady, and the target is steady ; that on board ship it is different, because the deck on which the gun rests may be all aslew, and never at the same angle for two seconds together ; and the whole ship bobbing up and down, and the target probably bobbing up and down also. It does take some gunnery to reach the mark then. But this! Why it's baby work as a man might say ; and "our pals in the 'tillery could do it as well as we did, only their little pop-guns don't carry far enough."

One could only think that if Jack made as good practice by sea as he did by land, then Heaven help somebody in our next naval war!

To take a glance round the field for a moment. Hildyard's (English) Brigade was first under fire, though not at close range, and was advancing on Colenso and the bridge. At the same time the central naval battery was searching the trenches and kopjes north of the bridge, with an occasional shy at the Fort, while the composite brigade of field and naval guns on Hildyard's right was directed at Fort Wylie. Very early in the battle the two field batteries were put out of action, and the guns left standing close to the enemy's riflemen. In no part of the field did these 15-pound field guns render much assistance. Hart's Brigade was just coming into action on the left when Long's field guns were boldly pouring shrapnel into Fort Wylie at short range. Hildyard's men began to get more closely engaged a few minutes before that time. Dundonald's Natalians commenced the storming of Hlangwane just about at the hour when Long's batteries became silent.

"MEN DROP BY THE WAY; BUT ON RUSHES THE LINE" (p. 318).

Hildyard's men, as we have said, advanced in perfect order and with admirable steadfastness on the right and left of the railway line. They had to march for a mile or more over perfectly open ground, without cover of any sort or kind, the ground being perfectly open and flat; until, near the banks of the river, there was a lot of rather dense scrub growing, affording some screen. For 800 yards or more those indomitable battalions walked in the midst of the fire. They walked bolt upright, never breaking alignment, never losing touch and Hotchkiss guns from Fort Wylie, and rifles from everywhere, vomited death into their ranks. Yet they still walked on, with the steady stride of the stiff-necked Anglo-Saxon.

It was agreed by all who saw the battle that the fighting of the Irish Brigade was a marvel of dare-devil bravery, that the fighting of the volunteer mounted infantry was a thing to be proud of, but that the most magnificent thing of the day was to see the Queen's and the Devons, the West Yorkshires and East Surreys, deliberately striding to meet the most terrible hail of musketry ever heard of in warfare.

Halfway across the open ground was a Boer trench, and when our men reached it they found it empty. So the Devons took shelter in it for a short time, and, for the first time, tried their Lee-Metfords. It was not a very exhilarating performance, because they could not see one single scrap of an enemy to fire at; and, indeed, up to that time they had not seen a Boer.

Many men were exposed to fire for ten hours that day and never saw an enemy the whole time. After half an hour of this, the order was given to advance by rushes of fifty yards at a time. The Queen's (West Surreys), on the other side of the railway, conformed to the movement; and so the advance continued. Rush! for ten exciting seconds. Men drop by the way; but on rushes the line. Lie down! Now use your rifles as you can, though it is like firing at a disembodied spirit. Another rush. Another halt. And so in gallant style the brigade reaches the scrub by the river bank. The battalions are thinner now; but our loss has not been so great as it might have been.

Once into the scrub, the men work their way through, themselves now invisible to the foe. But the everlasting Mausers still spit and spit, and bullets whistle through the bushes, and here and there a man drops. We are doing well—very well. We shall carry the town and the bridge after all. The guns on Fort Wylie are almost silent now, though the Mausers do not slacken. One more rush! Down! Another dash! Down again. Yet another. And so Colenso town is reached by two companies. Others go for the bridge and find it half ruined. They venture on it, not knowing but that the enemy have mined it, and that any moment they may find themselves blown sky-high.

Buller watches the advance. A few of the central brigade have gained a footing on the bridge. Others have occupied Colenso. The left brigade is making a gallant attempt to cross at Bridle Drift.

An officer, sore wounded and half dead, gallops up to Sir Redvers Buller. What! This is terrible! Long's Artillery has been hotly engaged, and has come under infantry fire. And the guns are silenced. The general makes up his mind at once. The passage is difficult, in any case. Without artillery it is impossible to force it. There is only one thing to be done—and that is, to recall the troops.

It is not for us to distribute blame; but somebody blundered. Sir Redvers Buller thought that Ogilvy's naval guns, as well as the two field batteries, had been silenced, and issued orders accordingly. To Hart it was—Retire. To Hildyard—Give up your attack. Let half your brigade hold Colenso in check, without becoming too closely engaged, and let the other half move to the right to keep down the fire covering Long's guns. To Barton—Support Hildyard. To Dundonald—Retire. It was a terrible moment for General Buller. This was his first great command, and he had lost his first battle.

He himself, with his staff, galloped across to the guns, to see what could be done to save them; and never did general expose himself with greater contempt of danger than Redvers Buller that day. Long ere this his courage had been tried and found proof—a man does not write V.C. after his name for nothing. And he sped across the country, a mark for bullet and shell. A splinter struck him in the side; but the bruise was nothing more than painful. He and his staff reached a point near the guns, and at once became a target. This was about 9.30 a.m. General Clery, chief of the staff, was struck in a curious way by a Mauser bullet which skimmed his chest, and again in the arm; the staff-surgeon, Hughes, was hit in the head by a bullet and died in half an hour; St. Leger Jervis was severely hurt.

As for the men of the 14th and 66th Batteries, when they found they had no more ammunition, and were exposed without protection or means of reply to a heavy short-range rifle-fire, they backed into a donga, leaving the guns. As to this there was no option, for every horse was shot down. They might have taken away the breech-blocks, so as to render the pieces useless; but they did not do so, because they had no manner of doubt that after a while the riflemen on the river bank would somehow be driven out, and then the guns would be re-manned. Colonel Long was severely wounded, and was likely to pay for his rashness with his life. And the men of the 14th and 66th Batteries who found the shelter of the donga were few indeed. Forty officers and men lay wounded or lifeless by the guns.

On receipt of the order from the general commanding, Hildyard promptly detached the men asked for to help the gunners. The idea was that they should creep along the bank of the Tugela and deal with the riflemen who commanded our two batteries. And accordingly half the 2nd Devons were despatched for the work. The colonel of that battalion, Lieut.-Colonel Bullock, recognising the special danger of the mission, did not send the half-battalion, but he took it, determined that should his brave lads be called upon to face anything unusually difficult, he would be there with them. All honour to him. It is the true spirit of the British officer. His senior major (Batson) was left in command of the other half-battalion.

Bullock moved along skilfully enough, under cover of the scrub, his men "prowling," if we may use the word, and putting in a shot whenever they could see anything to shoot at—which was seldom. In some way or other, in the confusion of battle, two companies of the Devons and two of the Scots Fusiliers of Barton's Brigade got together, under Bullock, and were ordered to move to the support of the guns. They reached the donga (called in India a "nullah"), where the men of the 14th and 66th Batteries had taken refuge; and here they had to stay. They tried to cross the fatal piece of open ground

to the river bed ; but every attempt was foiled by the terrible fire from the Mausers. The air was thick with lead, and to advance was altogether hopeless.

General Buller was standing about 500 yards behind the forsaken guns ; and he called for volunteers to go and rescue the pieces. There was no lack of them. The horses of the reserve ammunition waggons were taken out, and six drivers of the 66th Battery were found to do a daring deed for the glory of the Royal Artillery. Three young officers—Captain Schofield, R.A., Captain Congreve, Rifle Brigade, and Lieutenant Frederick Roberts, of the King's Royal Rifles, only son of "Bobs"—threw themselves at the head of the party. Corporal Nurse (66th Battery) was to the front in the work ; and the names of the drivers are Taylor, Young, Petts, Rockall, Lucas, and Williams, all of the same Battery. These heroes deserve that their names should be recorded ; for, of all the gallant deeds that day achieved, none was so great as this.

Two teams were got together, and those ten brave hearts dashed forward to the guns. The first movement took the Boers a little by surprise—it was so sudden and daring, and the little band gained two or three hundred yards without damage. Then the full fury of the storm burst upon them. Have you ever been on a lake or loch in a mountain country in a sudden squall ? When the sky becomes overcast, the air almost stiff, the water unruffled ; then, suddenly the earth and the heavens seem to melt. The thunder rolls, the wind descends and the rain ; and it seems your boat cannot live. This was the kind of squall that burst on Schofield and Congreve and Roberts and Nurse and the rest of them ; only the raindrops were solid, and came straight from the front instead of from above. And the roar was not the thunder of heaven, but the bellowings of hell.

Into that storm they went, horse and man, without blenching, without wavering. It seemed as if no one could live, much less go forward. Yet, so strange is the fortune of war that Schofield was not even touched as he galloped forward in the very front, a perfect target for the Mausers. Congreve was not so fortunate, yet he, too, was lucky. One bullet took a piece off the tip of his elbow—the left elbow. Almost at the same moment his horse was struck. Luckily the bullet did not reach a vital part, and maddened with pain the noble animal bounded forward. A third hit his rider in the right leg. Still, wounded and bleeding, both horse and man tore onward. Again the horse is hit, this time mortally, and falls heavily, bringing his rider to the ground. There is nothing now but to make for shelter, for it is of no use for a man on foot to go on to the battery. So Congreve crawls for the donga where Colonels Long and Bullock are lying with the shattered remnant of their men. He lies down there, and instantly a fifth bullet goes through the toe of his boot, but without so much as scratching him.

Meanwhile Schofield and Roberts and the corporal and the drivers continue their mad career towards the forsaken field-guns. They reach them, God knows how. Now for some smart work. Two guns are limbered up in a trice, the Mauser bullets rattling and pinging on them the while. Nearly every horse and man is bleeding ; but these two guns are saved. Back they gallop to the spot where the general stands admiring. The horses are in full career when, some eighty yards from the donga, one of the thousand whistling,

shrieking missiles strikes the gallant Roberts. There is no time to stop and pick him up, though every man of that little party would give his life's blood to help the son of "Bobs" for his father's sake and his own.

These two cannon are at last brought in, and the stern face of the general lights up with a proud smile as he says, "A gallant deed." And soon the Empire rang with the fame of those three young officers, the brave corporal and the six daring drivers who ran the gauntlet for the honour of the Army and the glory of the race.

Captain Reed, of the 7th Field Battery, came down with thirteen men and twenty-two horses, and offered to risk himself and them to rescue the guns. For, let it be said that the men of the Royal Artillery would rather be shot down to the last man than leave a gun in the hands of the enemy. To lose a gun is nearly as bad as to lose a flag; it is not so much the value of the thing lost as the disgrace of losing it. And, therefore, rather than that the Boers should be able to boast of ten guns captured, Reed and his men were ready to risk life and limb. Permission was readily accorded, and with three teams the little band galloped out. But this time they did not get a start. Every yard of the way bullets poured into them, and round them and over them. At half the distance thirteen of the twenty-two horses were shot dead. One driver had a bullet through his brain, and the captain and five others were badly wounded. Sadly enough, the rest returned, not because they dared not continue, but because they were now useless for the task in hand. There

THE DEATH OF LIEUTENANT ROBERTS.

were other offers to attempt a rescue. The sailors would gladly have gone in and hauled the guns out by main force. But General Buller saw full well that those ten guns could never be brought out of that awful fusillade except at a murderous sacrifice of life. So he forbade any more attempts. Even when, later in the day, some of the Imperials and South African Light Horse proposed to show their valour by bringing in the abandoned pieces, Buller refused to let them risk their lives; and thus it was that President Kruger was able to issue a proclamation that the Lord had delivered the British army into the hands of the burghers, and that ten guns had fallen into their hands as a prey. At eleven a.m. the order came to the naval gunners to retire. They did it after their own extraordinary fashion. They had no bullocks left to pull their heavy weapons. But when were the men of the Royal Navy ever at a standstill? They merely harnessed themselves to the carriages and pulled and pushed and hauled and lifted until their six 12-pounders were in safety. It was all in the day's work to them. They had been battering the Boers with great cheerfulness for many hours; and the last thing they did was to pitch a shell right on the end of the main wall of Fort Wylie, knocking that structure all in a heap. Fain would they have kept up the bombardment, but orders were orders.

It took the whole of Ogilvy's contingent to drag the guns home. There was, besides, a quantity of reserve ammunition in waggons. Not a single bullock-driver was to be found, but the man who owned the transport animals, one Pringle, swore that he would not leave the staff behind. He was but a civilian, and it was none of his business to risk his neck. Still, he was British, and he did. He collected some oxen, drove them back to the ammunition waggons, inspanned them, and coolly returned with the whole lot, what time the Boers from Fort Wylie and from the river bank and the kopjes pitched scores of shells and thousands of bullets at the intrepid transport contractor. Army contractors are usually regarded in these islands as publicans were by the Jews of old. Let it be remembered in the days to come that there was once an Army contractor whose name was Pringle.

To all intents and purposes the battle was now over. Hildyard's men had abandoned by order their attack on the bridge. Half of them were merely holding in check the enemy in front. Hart, with his wild Irish, was sullenly retiring on the left, his men praying to all the saints to put it into the heart of the Boer leader to follow them across the river. But the Boer leader knew better than to leave his trenches. On the right Dundonald waged a terrific contest. He had received orders to retire also, but was unable to carry out those orders because a party of the enemy was trying to outflank him. Had he retreated before sending the flanking party to the right about, he might have lost almost his whole force. So he kept on until he had given the flanking party a severe lesson. Of his own force there were very few men who did not bear marks of the fray. Out of about 600 Colonials 16 were killed and 66 wounded, a few men also missing. Besides, many had scratches which they took no account of. If anyone wants to know how our Irregular levies fought, let him glance at these figures. Nor did the day pass without an act of splendid heroism performed by one of these troopers. When at last the order was given to retreat, Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry retired at a hard gallop

under a heavy fire. For the Boers galloped after them for some distance, blazing away, and here it was that this fine corps lost most heavily. It is always so: a retreat must necessarily be expensive. Now there was a trooper whose horse was hit and himself also; and he crashed to the ground while his comrades swept on. Prison in Pretoria was his lot, and the horrid thought of it brought to his lips a groan such as his wound had not caused.

But who is this who rides back at break-neck speed, who pulls up his charger, lifts the wounded man into the saddle, and vaults up behind him? It is a young lieutenant named Ponsonby, who thus risks his life to save a comrade, and as he dashes back and rejoins the squadron the hardy troopers of Thorneycroft's shout with delight, for it was a gallant feat.

The battle now is over save for one last grim tragedy—a fitting close to the darkest day for the British arms that had been known for three generations. In the donga near the abandoned guns a few men were lying. There was Long, Colonel R.A., raving with a bullet through his liver. There was another Artillery colonel named Hunt, who had advised Long, when they found the batteries exposed to that terrible rifle-fire, to retire, and had received for answer—"Retire be d——d! We never retire." There was Bullock, colonel of the 2nd Devons, with many wounded and fifteen or twenty sound men of his battalion. There was Congreve, the five times hit and twice wounded. There was the inevitable doctor—one Babtie. And there were many men, wounded and whole, of the 14th and 66th Field Batteries.

Bullock had received no orders to retire, and, like the bulldog that he was, would not retire without orders. The donga was no more than three feet deep, and afforded little protection. Yet that handful of Devons held it from half-past nine to four in the afternoon, firing steadily and well at the trenches opposite.

Congreve distinguished himself again—a perfect glutton for glory this man! At eleven a.m. the firing had slackened considerably, and the Rifleman limped cautiously out to survey the field and to try to help the wounded. He found poor Roberts stretched on the field and sore wounded. Mauser bullets were whistling past and spattering up the earth around, and to stand erect was dangerous. Yet Congreve stood erect, raised the wounded man in his arms, and carried him into the donga's shelter. Then he went out again. Tell me—was Congreve's Victoria Cross well earned? Was it not twice earned, rather?

Practically abandoned by the rest of the force, the little party still held that absurdly untenable position against a whole host, until at four p.m. a body of Boers, eighty strong, rode out from the front, one of them bearing a white flag. They approached and parleyed, demanding a surrender. "Never!" Bullock replied; "we will all die, but we will not surrender." The Boers continued to parley, pointing out the absurdity of further resistance. "I tell you," said the undaunted colonel of the Devons, "that I will NOT surrender." And a fierce cheer from the bulldogs behind him emphasised the speech. "Then we shall have to fire on you, and we may happen to hit the wounded." This sounded—from the emphasis on the "happen"—like a threat to fire on the wounded, but still Bullock would not consent to surrender.

The Boers then opened fire, and the plucky handful of Devons responded and killed two. But the game was up. While the white flag party had been parleying, another body of Boers had worked round

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to the rear of the donga, and in a minute rushed the place and held rifles to the heads of the defenders. Still Bullock fought, though most of his men, perforce, threw down their arms. A blow on the head from the butt-end of a Mauser laid the colonel low, and in a flash the striker fell, with a foot of cold steel in his lungs. One of the Devon privates had too well avenged his chief, for he himself was shot on the instant.

The Boers took all the whole men prisoners, including the luckless colonel of the Devons. Roberts and Congreve and the rest of the wounded they allowed to go free. This surrounding of the little party in the donga under cover of a white-flag parley was one of those abuses of the emblem of truce that formed the most embittering element in the war. No one ever alleged that any responsible Boer commandant was a party to such proceedings, but it did appear more than once in the campaign that there were subordinate commandants in the enemy's ranks who thought no wrong of using the white flag by way of stratagem.

The little band of Devons and gunners were not the only party cut off and made prisoners that day. There was a band of Scots Fusiliers who went too far from the rest of their battalion and brigade; and these, to the number of between thirty and forty, were cut off, surrounded, and obliged to surrender. And of that intrepid band of Irishmen who swam the Tugela to "make a name for themselves" but few returned. Altogether the "missing" of Buller's army amounted to 228 officers and men.

That night, when the muster-roll was called, there were terrible gaps in the British ranks. The most wholesale losses had occurred in the case of the two blundering batteries, who had lost 2 officers and 8 men killed, 3 officers and 27 men wounded, and 5 officers and 64 men missing—a total of 109 casualties. The 2nd Dublin Fusiliers, who had borne the brunt of the attack on Bridle Drift, also suffered severely—2 officers and 38 men killed, and 3 officers and 148 men wounded.

You will appreciate the significance of these figures when you see that the total number of officers killed in the battle was 7, including the medical staff-officer; and the total of rank and file 128. Think of it! There were, in all, about 16,000 infantry, 2,500 mounted troops, 250 sailors, and 1,000 artillerymen and others. And one battalion accounted for more than a quarter of the slain. Of wounded there were in the whole army 756, so that this same battalion accounted for about one-fifth of the wounded.

Others to suffer heavily were the Connaught Rangers, with 24 killed and 105 wounded; the Inniskillings, with 18 and 86; and the West Surreys, with 3 and 91—four of these died next day.

Captain Reid and Corporal Nurse received the V.C., and the drivers who accompanied them the Distinguished Service Order.

The gallant young Roberts did not linger long in his agony. And when he died, the heart of the whole nation went out to that little white-haired soldier in Ireland, the man who had spent his whole life in the nation's service. But if anything could comfort a father's heart it was surely this: that his boy had died as a soldier ought to die, bravely doing his duty where duty was most perilous. And the Queen awarded to the son, as she had to the father when he, too, was a subaltern, that precious Cross, "For Valour"; and, as the hero himself could not receive it from her hands, she gave it to his proud and sorrowing mother.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE EMPIRE'S RESERVES.

DURING the week ending December 15th the state of the nation was not enviable. Gatacre smashed, Methuen discredited, Buller repulsed. The main army at Chieveley, unable to move for lack of guns, if for no other reason; and of the other three divisions only that of General French in a fit state to cope with the enemy. The war was two months old, and Mafeking was still locked up; Kimberley was still isolated; Northern Natal was still overrun.

It was truly a Black Week, whose darkness was acutely felt. One felt the gloom pervading everywhere. The step of the average Briton lost its spring for a few days—there was greater solemnity on his face and less levity in his conversation than usual. The country was stunned. Even the most optimistic saw that the foe had been under-estimated both as to numbers and military skill. The Boer was more wily than we had imagined.

But amid all the gloom there was no idea of our climbing down—it was still "We'll see it through"—it was still "The British flag must float over Pretoria and Bloemfontein." The valour of the Boer was seen and respected, but his cause was still the same. We had no dread of ultimate defeat. The nation had lost some prestige—to the great delight of her foreign rivals—but she kept her head.

There was plenty of criticism, and very energetic demands that more men from Britain should go out to the front—and a plethora of amateur strategists willing to contract to carry the British army from the Cape to Pretoria, after the manner of

PRIVATE OF THE C.I.V.
(Photo: W. Gregory & Co., Strand.)

a personally-conducted tour, at so much a head and in a brief space of time ; we heard about this general being too old and that too young ; suggestions of "red tape," "cut and dried," and "obsolete systems" were in the air. But amid all the talk there was no clamour for a victim.

There was neither fear nor panic, and the stolid determination of the race was never seen to better advantage than during Black Week, as day by day the country received long lists of killed and wounded and missing—news that carried deepest sorrow into the castle, the mansion, and the cottage.

Painful scenes were witnessed at the War Office, where the lists of killed and wounded were displayed. Now it was a father and mother whose only son had been cut down ; now a wife, who realised for the first time the awful meaning of the words, "Till death us do part" ; now a sister or a sweetheart, who had heard the last of some gallant young fellow from whom she had parted but a few weeks ago.

For the reverses that had befallen our arms had not come because our soldiers had not done their best. England *knew* that every man each day had done his duty. Therefore it had come to pass that our casualties were heavy. And while the country mourned for her departed heroes, she rejoiced in the fact that they had fallen as their sires had done —with their face to the foe.

The final result of Black Week was an outcry for more men and more drastic measures—for greater energy and the best of everything.

As soon as the news of Wauchope's death and the state of affairs in the Highland Brigade reached the Home Government, they appointed to fill his place Hector Macdonald, the man who began his career as a private in the Gordons, earned a commission by his courage and conduct in Roberts's Afghan campaign, fought as a lieutenant at Majuba, commanded an Egyptian Brigade at Omdurman, and was known the Empire over as "Fighting Mac." The news restored the confidence of the Highlanders.

And when it became obvious that a new campaign must be entered upon on a bigger scale than had at first been contemplated, the Government decided to appoint Lord Roberts of Kandahar to the command in South Africa, with Lord Kitchener as his chief of staff. Lord Roberts at once demanded that a large mounted force should be placed at his disposal.

No sooner was war declared than meetings were held in nearly every town, at which resolutions were passed supporting the vigorous prosecution of the war. The meeting in the Guildhall—convened by the Lord Mayor of London in response to an influential requisition—was characteristic of the public spirit and patriotism of the chief city of the Empire.

For two hours before the meeting commenced there was a continual convergence of human traffic towards the place of meeting. Bankers, merchants, and tradesmen, members of the Stock Exchange and clerks, with Members of the Lords and Commons, and a great assemblage of aldermen and councillors, made up a vast assemblage which represented the commercial and trading intelligence of the City. The Guildhall was packed to its utmost capacity. Outside there was even a larger crowd. The Royal Standard and the Union Jack were to the fore, and the crowds amused themselves by singing patriotic songs. Enthusiasm rose to fever heat.

The order was as marked as the enthu-

siasm, and it is a matter of question whether in any other capital in Europe the Police Band could have been spared to discourse sweet music to the heated multitude.

Only once was there a shade of anger in the meeting, and this was when, on the chief resolution being put to the meeting, a young man with more courage than discretion mounted a chair and voted to "the contrary." Then the citizens of London shouted in their wrath. They wanted to know the name and nationality of the contrary man, who, replying to questions, averred that he was a Scotsman but not a British citizen. The situation was dramatic as, standing on the chair, with pallid lips but determined face, he flung his glove at the meeting as his gage of battle. This was more than those around him could stand, and it would have gone ill with him but for his forcible ejection from the building.

The speakers at the meeting were responsible men, who had evidently well weighed their words, and the whole tone was indicative of the spirit of patriotism before party.

There was, doubtless, a great amount of loose and tall talk as men conversed with each other, but the watchword of the hour was "We must see it through," on the part alike of the merchant prince and the man who wore an apron.

What London said was echoed in the provinces, and at political meetings, and social gatherings, and places of public entertainment, it was "We must see it through." It was said jubilantly and loudly when the news last received was favourable to the Briton—sadly but emphatically when the news favoured the Boer. And as the situation became more serious—as it was recognised that we had underrated the numbers and resources of the foe—the emphasis grew stronger and stronger, "We *must* see it through." The sentiment was as simultaneous as it was sincere.

The temper of the country was evinced most markedly in the manner in which the Volunteer forces of the nation showed their grit. They did not wait to be asked. Colonel Sir Howard Vincent, M.P., of the Queen's Westminsters, offered the Government a battalion of Volunteers for home garrison duty, and another for duty in South Africa. The Earl of Albemarle (Civil Service Rifles) approached the Government as to the possibility of the acceptance of the services of a battalion made up from his regiment. Other commanding officers ascertained how many of their men were willing to volunteer for the front and for garrison duty. Suggestions were thrown out for enrolling a Volunteer Veterans' Brigade of men who had seen service in South Africa. The authorities were in no hurry to accept these offers. Cold water was thrown upon all the proposals made to them. The officials of the Circumlocution Office found many difficulties in the way. Refusal and procrastination seemed to be the order. But the ardour of the Volunteers was not cooled by the chilly reception given to their patriotic offers. New plans were proposed: the Government would have none of them. It seemed as if the services of railway and post office officials and telegraphists were the only ones likely to be accepted.

As late as November 24th Sir Howard Vincent had received no reply to his amended offer of 1,000 men for the front. In the meantime numerous offers had been made to him, and he strongly urged upon the Government that inas-

CONFERRING OF THE FREEDOM OF THE CITY ON THE C.I.V.

as the Volunteers of Canada, Cape Colony, Natal, Australia, and New Zealand had had an opportunity of showing their mettle, this would be a good opportunity for improving the general tone of the Army by the temporary inclusion of a considerable number of our citizen soldiers. On the date abovenamed the Under-Secretary for War replied that at present there was no probability of the militia battalions being exhausted, and *therefore* "no immediate prospect of our being able to avail ourselves of the patriotic offers of the Volunteers."

It was, or appeared to be, the old story of the professional soldiers regarding the amateurs as more likely to be ornamental than useful. It might be very well to include the "Auxiliary forces" with the "Army and Navy" in a toast list, but as for their fighting abilities, the least said the soonest mended. But when Gatacre lay crippled at Putter's Kraal, Methuen powerless at Modder River, and Buller paralysed at Colenso, a change had to be made in the tone of the War Office, and the Government had to choose between depleting India of troops and the calling on of the home Volunteers.

On December 18th the Government decided to accept the services of the Volunteers, the official statement on the subject being that a strong force of volunteers from the Yeomanry regiments would be formed for South Africa, with a large contingent of carefully selected foot.

The details of the Government plans were published a day or two later. The enlistment in each case was to be "for one year, or not less than the period of the war." The number of Yeomanry was limited to 125 from each regiment, and the Volunteers were to be attached to, and form part of their territorial regular regiments.

Before the details were published the success of the scheme was assured. The Volunteers rose to the occasion; and keen was the disappointment of many good men and true when they heard that the minimum age was to be twenty and the maximum thirty-five; and that married men were to be all sternly rejected.

Readers of Scott will remember his description of the military ardour and alacrity of the inhabitants of Fairport on the occasion of a false alarm of invasion, and how a certain Bailie spiritedly replied at a time when there was some difficulty in billeting the men: "Let us take the horses into our own warehouses, and the men into our parlours—share our supper with the one, and our forage with the other. We have made ourselves wealthy under a free and paternal government, and now is the time to show we know its value."

This was no false alarm, but the country was one huge Fairport. The Volunteers were "Ready, ay, ready," and the country showed that it knew the value of the force.

Just as the Reserves, bound by agreement, had answered the call to arms without demur or delay, the Volunteers, impelled by the lust of glory and the love of country, stepped to the front. To them Honour was more than Falstaff's "word"—and its possession was not solely with those who had died.

This was the usual happening from one end of the country to the other. The corps was mustered—there was a call for volunteers—and the men stepped out of the ranks, in most cases altogether beyond the number that the said corps was entitled to furnish.

As it is impossible to give the full list of towns and villages where this patriotic

spirit was shown, and to single out a few only for honourable mention would be invidious, we can only mention what happened in the chief cities.

In Birmingham and the Midlands the cause was taken up with great heartiness. One of the local newspapers opened a fund for the equipment of the local Volunteer contingent which volunteered for the front. Collections in aid of equipment, or in furtherance of the movement for helping the Reservists and the wounded and bereaved, were made in nearly all the places of worship and workshops in the district. The quota required by the War Office was raised without difficulty. And the spirit in which the matter was taken up was attested when, on January 14th, the men selected for service attended their final church parade (before leaving for the front). Attended by some 600 of their comrades in arms, the little band of white-helmeted Volunteers passed through a crowd of some 25,000 of their fellow citizens who, despite a downpour of rain, lined the streets. Cheers loud and continuous greeted them every inch of the way The church was, as a matter of course, crowded—the congregation including the Lord Mayor and the members of the Corporation On their return from the service in the church, the crowd which had been patiently waiting in the streets and at the windows of the houses renewed the ovation. What with dinners, and presents, and hearty cheers at the stations, the Birmingham jewellers who were destined to stay at home did due honour to the men who had volunteered to represent them in South Africa.

Sheffield upheld its reputation as a patriotic town, as in 1794, when she raised 500 Loyal Independent Sheffield Volunteers (very *independent* some of them were if all reports are true). Sheffield prides herself that the formation of the present Volunteer Force was as largely due to the eloquence of her "Tear 'em" at the Cutlers' Feast as to the Laureate's invitation—

> "Form! Form! Riflemen form!
> Ready! be ready to meet the storm."

And now the sturdy blades were not content to be set aside as "wasters," but to come up to the quality of the local couplet which sums up the acme of excellence in

> "Sheffield made
> Haft and blade."

Ten officers and 250 men of the local Artillery Volunteers offered their services before the request came to them. The colonel of the Hallamshire Rifles, at a special parade at Hyde Park on December 23rd, secured a muster of 650 men, of whom 300 volunteered for the front and the whole of the remainder for garrison duty. Subsequently 100 men of the Sheffield Engineers were accepted for active service.

The citizens of Liverpool and Manchester were by no means backward in their efforts, and the red rose ran a close race with the white. Every Volunteer battalion contributed its quota, and the offers of service were greatly in excess of the requirements. The Manchester Artillery gave 200 men, and the Infantry, including "mounteds," were up to the mark in mettle and in number. Ashton and Bolton and Bury and Heywood and the other large towns of the County Palatine showed their patriotism in a commendable manner. Funds were liberally contributed. The send-offs were enthusiastic. And the Lancashire lads, officered by well-known local men, went to the front amid the hearty cheers of their fellows and the proud sobs of the Lancashire witches

In Scotland the contributions to the various war funds were numerous and weighty, Glasgow and Edinburgh subscribing as much as Liverpool and Manchester. Over 2,000 Scottish Volunteers went to the front, and the Scottish contingent to the Imperial Yeomanry numbered 530. The Glasgow Volunteers were presented with the freedom of the city, and were feasted and toasted to their hearts' content. The entraining and embarkation of the men were occasions upon which the proverbial taciturnity of the Scot gave place to scenes of wild enthusiasm, as the pipes played "Auld lang syne" and "Will ye no come back again?" and the lads and lassies cheered and sang, and sang and cheered. And all the way down the Clyde the people on board the ships and on the shores wished them God-speed and a safe return.

As a sample of the smaller towns we may cite Kidderminster. The "carpets" were possessed by a very pronounced military spirit, and it is interesting to note that the local fund for the benefit of the families of those gone to the war was supported by numerous subscriptions from Kidderminster working men settled in Philadelphia and Worcester (Massachusetts). The men were presented with sundry personal comforts at a public dinner. There was a parting church parade at the parish church, and at the send-off the scene was unparalleled in the town. From the headquarters to the municipal buildings and thence to the railway station there was one continuous ovation. The police and the railway officials were powerless to regulate the crowd, which swarmed over every available inch of space—the platforms, the embankments, the bridges, the signal-boxes. But the crowd was good-tempered, and there was no mishap. The captain was carried to his compartment shoulder high; the band played as the men took their places. The last handshakes were given and the last good-byes spoken, and the train left amid mighty cheers almost sufficient to awaken the echoes on the Malvern hills.

It goes without saying that the metropolis was to the fore in the movement for utilising the Volunteer forces. For though the Londoner has been wont to chaff the citizen soldiers, and to call them "feather-bed soldiers," he has always been interested in their movements, and applauded their soldierly appearance in Hyde Park and at Shorncliffe and Aldershot, and their successes at Wimbledon and Bisley.

The Lord Mayor of London approached the Government as to the provision by the City of 1,000 volunteers—not more than twenty men to come from any one regiment—the entire cost to be borne by the Corporation and the City companies. The proposal was accepted. At a private meeting contributions equal to £32,000 were made by seven donors. The Corporation voted £25,000 from the City funds, and decided to present the Freedom of the City to every accepted volunteer. There was never any doubt as to the ability of the City to raise the men and the money, and it was soon seen to be impossible to limit the number to 1,000. The offers of service were entirely beyond the requirements. Over 2,000 names were sent in within twenty-four hours of the Lord Mayor's appeal. The London Scottish made up their quota in about three hours. The Inns of Court were almost as prompt, and offered mounted infantry and a cyclists' section, as well as a whole company of infantry. The Honourable Artillery Company, lineal successors of the Train Bands of the Parliamentary Civil

War, sent both infantry and gunners. The Queen's Westminsters sent over eighty stalwart fellows out of many times that number who offered themselves.

On January 1st the Lord Mayor attended at the Guildhall to preside over the enrolment of the City Imperial Volunteers. As the contingents marched from their headquarters to the Guildhall, they were enthusiastically cheered. King Street and Cheapside were almost impassable with crowds assembled to greet the various detachments—the pick of the Volunteer army, young and strong and trained men all of them. The Artists were the first to put in an appearance (fifty strong), then the 3rd London, then the Inns of Court, the London Irish, and the picked men of some seven other corps, to the number of 411. The scene was one to be long remembered. The Lord Mayor and sheriffs, and aldermen, representatives of the Municipal Authority of the first city of the Empire, with the commanders of the various Volunteer corps, were met on a historic occasion. The Lord Mayor gave a brief and inspiring address, and then the men came forward in batches to swear allegiance as soldiers of the Queen. Men of all ranks took the oath of the private soldier enlisting into the British army, each man receiving a new shilling from the hands of the Lord Mayor. The recruits entered the Hall as civilians; they left it as duly attested and enlisted soldiers, who had covenanted to well and truly serve their Queen and country wherever they might be called. Similar scenes were witnessed on the days immediately following, and the men went into close drill and training in the arts of war.

On January 12th the "Freedom of the City"—an honour coveted by the greatest and wealthiest of the earth—was conferred upon the troops. It was one of the most brilliant functions ever witnessed in the Guildhall, as historical as it was unique. Inside and outside the Hall the reception given to the Volunteers was one to stir men's blood. The recipients of the ovation were fairly overcome with the warmth of their "God speed" from the City.

On the evening of the same day the first contingent for the front—500 men—attended a farewell service at St. Paul's. No language can adequately describe the scenes witnessed on that occasion. The crowds were as great as those that rendered St. James's Street impassable on Jubilee night. The cheering was loud and long, and the gallant 500 had almost to fight their way in and out of the Cathedral. The service was simple, and the address by the Dean was brief and manly.

From St. Paul's the 500 went to the Inner Temple, where they were feasted by the Benchers. The revelry lasted until midnight, when they returned to headquarters prior to their departure from London early next morning. That march to Nine Elms Station will never be forgotten by those who witnessed it. Enthusiasm had been shown when the regular troops had marched out, but "never aught like this." As the C.I.V.'s reached the streets they were at once greeted with deafening cheers. Five hundred likelier fellows never trod the streets of London—young men who had answered the summons of their Queen, their country, their City at the call of duty, to risk their limbs and their lives for the sake of the homeland. Their hearts were as steady as their step. The march was a triumphal procession all the way—the streets were not lined, but packed, and the boisterous shouts were full of goodwill. So many acquaintances and friends turned

THE FAREWELL SERVICE AT ST. PAUL'S.

out for a last word or a last shake of the hand, that the order of the march could not be maintained. Here and there many a touching scene was enacted—as fathers and mothers, sisters and sweethearts, gasped out "Good-bye"—but all knew that the path of honour was the path of duty. The Lord Mayor and Sheriffs went down to Southampton to wish them God-speed and a safe return. All the way the cheering lasted—from the time the Volunteers left their headquarters in London until they had passed out of sight in Southampton Water. For even as the train sped on from Waterloo to the port of embarkation, every point from which a good view of them could be had was occupied by ladies who waved their good wishes and good-byes, and by men who cheered with hearty goodwill.

The following week similar scenes were enacted, when the second and largest contingent was sent off, the only variation being that on the eve of their departure their hosts were the Benchers of Gray's Inn and Lincoln's Inn. It was a wonderful sight in Gray's Inn Hall that night; and it is worthy of note that two of the long tables at which the men dined were made of Spanish oak, timber that had formed part of a Spanish ship presented by Queen Elizabeth to her favourite Inn of Court as a reward for fitting at their own expense and manning a ship to defend England's shores from the haughty Don. The third and final contingent sailed on January 27th. Their send-off was less boisterous, but the Lord Mayor and the Lady Mayoress entertained them at supper on the eve of their embarkation.

It is to be borne in mind that the City Imperial Volunteers formed only a small part of London's Volunteers for the front. The Westminsters, London Irish, the London Scottish, and, indeed, every corps in the metropolis, was animated by the same spirit as had animated their comrades in the provinces, and took every available opportunity of joining their various territorial regiments. One party of the London Scots, to its great pride and glory, was attached to the Gordon Highlanders; the London Irish to the Irish Rifles; the Queen's Westminsters to the King's Royals, and so on. Their chief cause of complaint was that the conditions of acceptance for service at the front were too rigorous, and that many men who considered themselves thoroughly "fit" were rejected for one cause or another.

Amongst the disappointed ones was Colonel Sir Howard Vincent, who, after being asked to accept the command of the City Imperial Volunteers, was rejected by the medical experts. Even this did not prevent him from going to South Africa. And so it was with many another brave man whose military ardour was not to be strangled by red tape.

It may be interesting to note that at a meeting of the Court of Common Council held on February 9th, the Lord Mayor announced that the total number of the C.I.V.'s sent to the front was 50 officers and 1,550 men, of whom 350 were mounted infantry. With these suitable tent and camp equipment, together with means of transport, had been sent out. Also four small Maxim guns and four quick-firing 12½-pounders, with the necessary amount of ammunition. To defray the cost the sum of £115,000 had been subscribed, of which the City Companies had given £32,000. The whole affair had been managed in a business-like manner, and there was a balance in hand to meet any future contingencies.

There could be no question that the

City of London had shown itself not unmindful of its position as the Metropolis of the Empire, nor untrue to the traditions of those princely traders who in the old days gave to us our Indian Empire, and never failed to carry in their ships cargo not only to increase the wealth of the owners but also to uphold the honour of the flag and to repel all aggression. If anyone thought that the Londoner was a degenerate product of an effete civilisation, surely the events of 1899-1900 must have changed his opinions.

And not only the Volunteers of the British Isles but high-spirited youths from every corner of the British Empire poured forth, eager to show their love for Queen and country and the unconquerable energy of the race.

The home Militia, almost to a man, volunteered for foreign service; and the first battalion to go to the front was the Durham Light Infantry, hardy pitmen, men of extraordinary physique. And these gallant fellows, be it said, were making sacrifices. The coal trade was good, wages ruled high, and it was calculated that a year's service would cost the battalion £200,000. But Britons that day spared nor blood nor gold in the cause of the race's supremacy. Three times in a week we had been beaten. We might be beaten three times more—ay, or thirty times, for that matter—but so long as there remained a man of British blood strong enough to hold a rifle, so long should the struggle be continued.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE SIEGE OF LADYSMITH (*continued*).

AFTER the Prince of Wales's birthday, when the Boers made their first attack and were so easily repulsed, everybody in Ladysmith felt quite happy. A good many civilians had refused to go into the camp at Intombi Spruit, and these now congratulated themselves on their pluck. The bombardment was not so very dreadful, after all. Why! In a whole fortnight only two people were hit. And if you liked to burrow you could make yourself a shelter, bomb-proof, in the Klip River bank —a riparian residence in very truth. And it was quite safe to go into the town at night to sleep, for except on one or two very rare occasions the besiegers did not bombard after dusk. In fact, as has been said before, they conducted the operation in most leisurely fashion, with due intervals for meals and sleep.

Still, the garrison was in a harassed position. The town itself was in the very hollowest part of a basin and indefensible. The only way of defending it was by occupying the hills round, of which there were two circles—an outer and higher, and an inner and lower one. General White's task would have been fairly easy if he had been able to hold the outer circle, but he could not for the very good reason that his men were too few to go round. So he had to be content with the lower, inner circle, commanded by the other, but of much less extent. As it was the British troops had a good eleven miles of trenches and fortifications to hold, and had something less than 1,000 men per mile to hold them.

Now here comes in a little of White's generalship. It was said at the time by critics both English and foreign, "Why in the world has White kept 2,000 of Britain's finest cavalry shut up in a besieged town? When he knew a siege to be inevitable, why did he not send away this splendid body of horsemen? Cavalry is for the open country, not for the holding of fenced cities."

Which was most sapient. Yet General White knew what he was doing when he kept his cavalry with him. For he used them as mounted infantry after this fashion :—They were not detailed to defend any particular spot ; they were kept loose and ready, so that if, say, a very large body of the enemy were to make a determined assault, well pressed home, on Cæsar's Camp, where the Manchesters dwelt, whilst at the same time the other positions were being attacked in such fashion as to keep the defenders busy, then the 2,000 horsemen or part of them could be hurled into Cæsar's Camp, dismounted, and join the firing line.

In fact, the cavalry was retained out of a far-seeing policy. There was not enough infantry to form any reserve after manning the line of entrenchments ; and, moreover, it would have been impossible to move infantry at the rate desired. The proof of the pudding is in the eating ; and the proof of the wisdom of White's policy was to be found in the chorus of thanks from the men beleaguered—thanks that there was a considerable mobile force in

"THE LANCERS WERE FOND OF DRAWING THE ENEMY'S FIRE (p. 338).

the town to be hurried from point to point where the fire was hottest.

After November 9th, the Boers were pretty quiet for a while. True, Long Tom and Weary Willie and their satellites dropped, in a desultory way, shells into the town, while the riflemen sniped such of our men as they could see. And Tommy Atkins, ever ready for a "lark," prepared small jokes for himself in the way of hoaxes for Brother Boer on the opposite side. The Lancers were fond of drawing the enemy's fire by the old dodge of a helmet on the end of a rifle; and Mr. Atkins made straw figures—or, rather, he stuffed some khaki suits with straw, put helmets on them, and, making them look as life-like as possible, raised them over the parapet, and stood them upright. Soon a Boer, looking through his glasses, would spy these figures. What! Three British soldiers! What fools they must be to expose themselves like that! Here! Hans! Piet! Two thousand yards, isn't it—or a little over? Carefully, steadily! And three rifles would ring out, and three bullets, as likely as not, go slapping through the dummies.

The Boers do not know what to make of it. Clearly the shots have missed. Yet those three fools on Helpmakaar Hill still stand out, smoking their pipes. "Allow more for the wind this time. All together! Oh! this is exasperating. There the three lunatics stand defiantly. There is a Lancer, we can tell he is a Lancer, one of the men we hate; and he keeps walking about with his head above the level of the parapet. A dozen rifles, fired a dozen times each, neither quicken nor slacken his pace. This is too much. Blaze away!" And blaze away they do for a good half-hour, while the men in the trenches and behind the sangars laugh and chaff as the bullets whistle and scream overhead. Then the dummies are carefully hauled in, great pains being taken to give them life-like motions; and the Boer sharpshooters, who cannot understand what makes them shoot so badly, give themselves a rest.

Besides the dummy figures, the soldiers in the Helpmakaar defences have constructed dummy parapets, some yards in front of the real entrenchments; and these cause the Boers to waste a lot of ammunition. It is dreary work, day after day, night after night, in the trenches; and blessed is the company that owns a comic singer or one who can troll out some ditty with a chorus. The *sang froid* of Thomas Atkins is marvellous, and that of Jack not less so. Shells might howl and bullets whistle overhead, but you would see half a dozen men with a greasy pack of cards playing "Nap" or "All fours," or a pair of Scots with a home-made board engaged in the mimic warfare of draughts; nor would they move a muscle, though Long Tom bellowed never so angrily and the Mauser bullets pattered never so incessantly.

So long as the men stuck to their entrenchments, their trenches, and their sangars, there was little fear of being hit. It was only an occasional venturesome private or non-com. who, exposing some part of himself against the skyline, brought upon himself the bullets of the Boer marksmen. Such was the case of Sergeant Macdonald, who went out of shelter to look where the shell-fire was coming from, and had to be fetched in, mortally wounded. His dying words were, "What a pity I went out to see!"

On November 14th the Boers, for the first and almost the only time, bombarded the town during the night, and they gave

the inhabitants, who usually emerged from their burrows at sundown, a rare fright. Luckily the shells did no particular harm to anyone. The garrison turned out under arms. Ammunition was served out ; every fighting man tried the action of his rifle to see that it worked smoothly. For all thought the bombardment to be the prelude or the accompaniment of an attack. But it was a false alarm. The cannonade only lasted from midnight until one a.m. ; there was no rifle firing, and the sentries reported seeing no one.

The next day (November 15th) a reconnaissance was made by our cavalry and a field battery, but, beyond a little shelling of which the Boers had decidedly the worst, nothing was done. And so the siege went on from day to day. A little shelling from the Boers at intervals in the morning and afternoon—replied to on very rare occasions by the naval guns; a little sniping by both sides, but not much damage ; and occasionally a dash out by some of our mounted men, resulting in a skirmish.

As for life in the camp and town, it began to be monotonous by the middle of November. Colonel Ward, an officer of exceptional organising talent, had been appointed military governor of Ladysmith, and he took measures to regulate and economise the food supply and to see that no stores were wasted. He soon knew to about an ounce exactly what there was in the town in the way of food, clothing, medical stores and comforts for the sick, and so on. Most of them he "requisitioned" for the use of the military authorities ; a process like the Boer "commandeering"—with this important exception, however, that the British always paid for everything requisitioned, while the Boers did not pay for anything commandeered.

Rations of bread and meat were served out to everybody. No food was allowed to be wasted ; for even at this stage it began to be seen that in all likelihood the garrison would need every ounce. Little luxuries, such as jam and marmalade, eggs and milk, sugar and tea, soon rose to enormous prices, until even the Imperials, most of whom were very well-to-do, could not afford them. And it is extraordinary how the stomach tires of a monotonous diet, especially when that diet is practically sugarless. Bread, biscuit, and bully-beef (otherwise known as "tinned American") may contain all the constituents necessary to sustain the human body, but the human body craves for fresh vegetables and fruit and sweet things. And before very long Ladysmith was practically without these articles of diet. Still, the health of the troops and the townsfolk was wonderfully good during November and well into December, and their spirits kept up also, for they confidently expected to be relieved by a British army before Christmas Day.

As for actual fighting with the investing army, so far from fearing it, the garrison welcomed it as a change from the grinding monotony of the bombardment. They hoped, every man of them, that in time a chance would come for Sir George White to lead them out, to lead them to strike a blow that would cripple the enemy and render him an easy prey. Indeed, many thought, at that time, that the garrison might raise the siege itself. And there was no one but believed that as soon as troops arrived from England the Boers would be driven back from the Tugela and Colenso. Then they (the garrison) would fall on the enemy's rear ; and he would find himself forced to stand and fight to a finish, for he would have a line of British bayonets in front and rear.

The greatest obstacle to the conduct of the defence of the town was the presence of persons of the Boer Intelligence Department: spies, that is, and traitors, who contrived to give warning to the enemy of our every movement. "I could not move a gun at night," said Sir George White, speaking after the siege was over, "but the enemy knew it before morning." And in these circumstances it was quite impossible to attempt to carry out any movement depending for its success upon surprise, except some movement, perhaps, by a small body of troops. For a large body, much less the whole force, could not move without warning being conveyed in some mysterious way to the hills. There was some signalling with lights, but most of the information was probably conveyed by Kaffirs. These could slip out past the sentries with little difficulty by crawling, almost naked, over the ground, and so expert were they that they could wriggle along, snake-like and noiselessly for long distances.

A NAVAL GUN AND SANDBAG EMPLACEMENT AT LADYSMITH.

There were certain passages in the siege of a mediæval kind, and funny with a grim humour of their own. Early in November a great procession, preceded by a man carrying a white flag, was seen advancing towards our lines; and, on one of the British officers going out to

inquire the business of the truce-bearer, he was informed that the procession consisted of Asiatics, coolies who worked in the coal-mines at Glencoe and Elandslaagte and Newcastle; that these coolies, on being captured by the Boers, declared themselves British subjects and claimed the protection of the British flag. Wherefore General Joubert had sent them to General White with compliments. They had claimed the shelter of the Union Jack; Ladysmith was the only place in that part of the world where the flag flew—hence, the coolies had been driven to Ladysmith.

It need scarcely be said, perhaps, that General White refused to extend the hospitality of the town to the miserable Asiatic subjects of her Majesty. There were quite enough civilians in the British lines—indeed, far too many; and another two hundred mouths to feed might make all the difference in the world. Wherefore General White declined the coolies with thanks. The unfortunate wretches, accepting their fate with stoical resignation, resumed their wanderings, and the garrison laughed heartily at the simple cunning of Joubert. "He knows he can never carry the place," said one, "so he is trying to starve us out quickly."

Another incident, more honourable to all concerned, but still showing a curious simplicity of mind on the part of the Boers (coupled with either a very high opinion of British humanity or a very low one of British intelligence), was a request brought in by a Red Cross man for a supply of some drug for their sick. It was chlorodyne that was asked for, a drug used for the cure of dysentery. The Red Cross Boer also insinuated that the Boer doctors were short of brandy. The request was granted without demur or hesitation. The drug, whatever it may have been, was put up in bottles, a small quantity of brandy, all that could be spared, was set apart, and the Boer messenger returned to the beleaguering lines bearing with him means of life and health for the sick. For, despite the horrors of war, it is not all horrible; and one of the rules governing a war between civilised nations is that all sick and wounded are the common care.

Meanwhile the garrison was suffering some of the hardships of a siege. November was a wet month, and this meant many things to the garrison—some good, some bad. It meant, for instance, that the cavalry and transport beasts were able to get a little grass. But it also meant misery for the soldiers who were compelled to spend days and nights in the trenches. It requires little to imagine the effect upon a man, even a hardy man and a tough, when he has to lie out all night in pouring rain, the air as cold and raw as an English January night, or even colder, and then, when the watch is over, not to go into a comfortable bed, to be refreshed with substantial hot meals and so on, but to be obliged to sleep in a tent, and to have nothing to eat except canned beef and hard biscuit.

No wonder that ere the siege had progressed a fortnight dysentery began to appear amongst the troops. It was not very bad at first—not so bad, in fact, as the doctors had expected it to be; but as the siege wore on into its fifth week—that is, about the beginning of December—the sickness began to spread rapidly. And to it was added that invariable camp-sickness, enteric fever. The Medical Corps worked like—well, the Royal Army Medical Corps. Nothing can either be said or imagined to improve on that. And to their efforts was owing the salvation of Ladysmith as much as to any other human

agency. From December the men began to be sick, not in ones and twos, but in companies and battalions, regiments and squadrons.

It was the business of the R.A.M.C. to have enough men in Ladysmith capable of manning the defences. And they did it. Thinner and thinner grew the fighting line. Gaunter and gaunter grew the soldiers of the Queen. Hunger and disease played havoc with those fine regiments. But somehow the R.A.M.C. managed to patch the men up, to dose them up with chlorodyne and quinine, and to send them back just able to handle breech-block and carbine, rifle and bayonet ; just able to sit a horse and to charge at a shaky double. As the weeks went by the labours of the Corps grew heavier and heavier, for there was hardly a man of the garrison who did not pass through the hospital. Some came and went three or four times. A man would be down with dysentery, go into hospital, be cured, and straightway go back into the trenches. He could not be spared from duty once he was out of bed. Then in a week or two he would be down with enteric (and little wonder), would be patched up again and sent out again into the trenches, a gaunt and haggard ghost of the strapping soldier who had charged at Elandslaagte or Talana.

Still, up to the middle of December there was no lack of high spirits in the garrison ; and when they heard that an army was being collected to march to their relief, they never doubted that Joubert would be ignominiously driven out of Natal by Christmas Day. Since the attack of November 9th the Boers had left the garrison unmolested, save for the lazy, monotonous bombardment and a little sniping. It was plain that starvation was to be the weapon now. And the men of the garrison had no fear on this head, for they had provisions enough to last, with care, for two months—until the end of January, and it was absurd to doubt that long before then relief would reach them. There was even grumbling amongst some of the civilian population when they were put upon rations strictly limited in quantity—they thought this hoarding of food an excessive and unnecessary piece of carefulness, amounting to miserliness.

To the troops, the worst part of the siege was its monotony. And you can easily imagine that as November waned and December came in they began to weary. There was the same bombardment every day—rather more annoying than dangerous ; the same sniping at about a mile's distance ; the same watch and ward to be kept day and night ; the same bully-beef and biscuit for the scanty meals. Not an attack to reward a man for his days and nights of watching. And how bitterly and how often the soldiers cursed the Boers for their lack of dash would astonish you. To sit day after day, week after week, outside a town of no great strength seemed to Tommy Atkins such an unsportsmanlike thing that he accused the Boers of sheer cowardice.

Another thing somewhat galled Mr. Atkins. He was yawning himself to death with *ennui*, and his commanders would not take him out for a sortie. During the first few weeks of the siege there had been football matches and cricket matches, and the Gordons got up some sports, which included a mule race open to all comers. The said race was won by a sailor, who arrived at the winning-post hanging on his steed with his arms round its neck and his legs round its body—his own body slung over the side.

But the spies and traitors in the town

used to give warning to the Boer gunners, and Long Tom and Puffing Billy and Silent Susan and Weary Willie, and Faith, Hope, and Charity would pitch shells amongst the sportsmen in the most unsportsmanlike fashion. The Gordons had to be restrained from playing at football after three 94-pound shells dropped on the field during the progress of a match. And after a time, when dysentery and enteric fever had gone the round of the garrison, there was little superfluous energy left for these diversions.

The Boers were not the only people who could manage the spy business. Sir George White had in his camp one or two Colonials who were willing to enter the Boer camp and see what they could find out. It was one of these danger-scorning persons who, in the first week of December, brought word to the British general that the Long Tom on Lombard's Kop—a new 94-pounder that had recently been placed in position on a jutting spur of that eminence—was none too well guarded o' nights. Now this same gun had been the source of much annoyance ever since it had been placed on the spur aforesaid, and to silence it would be worth something. The question was, how and when.

White had always been a dashing soldier, and had had a reputation for pluck for many a long year. In Afghanistan the tribesmen still remembered the British officer who, when his men faltered, seized a rifle, ran ahead all by himself into a mass of the enemy, and shot their leader at close quarters. It may well be imagined that a soldier of this calibre would lend a favourable ear to any scheme, however daring, provided it appeared to have in it a possible chance of success. Wherefore Sir George White was easily persuaded to authorise a certain plan propounded by his chief of staff, the wily and resourceful "Archie" Hunter.

It was this. A party of Colonials should sally out one dark night, climb the spur at its steepest part, drive the enemy off and hold them off long enough for some sapper to blow a hole in the gun with a charge of gun-cotton. The plan seemed sound enough provided it was carried out, as they say in commerce, with promptitude and despatch. Another essential was secrecy, and to this end not a soul was told of the plan—not even any member of the staff. Only White and Hunter knew—until the night of December 7th. At midnight some of those admirable irregulars and keen fighters, the Natal Carbineers and the Imperial Light Horse, to the number of 100 men of each corps, were sent for, and told to parade armed, and on foot. These were the men selected actually to storm the height. Three hundred mounted volunteers were also taken, to protect the attacking force and cover their retirement. Lieutenant Fowke, R.E., and a few gunners and sappers accompanied to do the hard work, as their vocation is.

To say that the Imperials and Carbineers were delighted is to express oneself too mildly. When they were told what was expected of them they were wild with joy. Here was a difficult, delicate, and dangerous piece of work to be done, and they—they! the Outlanders and the Natalians, the Volunteers—were selected to do it, and not, as might have been expected, the Devons or the Gordons, or any other of the crack battalions of the line. No one more than a man of war appreciates a compliment, and the Imperials and the Carbineers and the Volunteers regarded their being sent on this ticklish business as the highest compliment the general could pay them. They would

storm that height or die in the attempt. Nothing on earth should stop them. The general trusted them. He should see how worthy of trust they were.

The actual storming party was under command of Colonel Edwards, and Major Henderson marched in the front with guides. They steered straight as the crow flies to the foot of the kop, and the 200 valiant men followed in perfect silence. Scott-Chisholme had shown the Imperials how to spread themselves out for skirmishing, though still keeping touch—and they had improved upon his teaching. They and the Carbineers went up the hill like cats—noiselessly, and often on all fours. But the Dutchmen had sharp eyes; and presently there was a challenge from a picket, "Wie gaat da."

A terrific cheer was the only answer given; and the picket promptly fired and gave the alarm. "The English are upon us," he screamed. Henderson was in the van. "Charge!" he yelled, and himself set off up the slope at full speed. He was hit by a bullet before he had gone far; but of that he took no account. Up he went at the run. The whole storming party followed with its best foot foremost; and they took the slope at a pace that would astonish anyone who has not seen a guides' race in the Lake District.

A storm of bullets burst from the top; but besides Henderson, only one man, shot through the spine, was hit. For some hundreds of yards the very steepness of the hill was their protection and their safety, because, as has been elsewhere explained, it is difficult for a man on top of a very steep slope to depress his rifle so as to fire at something that is nearly under his feet.

This fact accounts for the bold band arriving nearly at the top of the spur with hardly any loss. But at twenty yards they were a good target for the defenders, and would have been a better had not the misty twilight been as a shield. At that distance the Boers could see them—could see, that is, some figures looming out of the night—and at once a fierce rifle fire broke out. It was answered by a fiercer shout as Edwards, springing to the front, yelled the word of command, "Fix bayonets! Give them the cold steel!"

"The cold steel! The cold steel!" Two hundred voices took up the shout, and Carbineers and Imperials sprang at the entrenchment.

It was like magic. The firing ceased instantly, and in a moment the Boers disappeared. They could stand many things, and would stand up or lie down cheerfully enough to be shot at. But those "knives on gun-barrels"—angels and ministers of grace defend them from the bayonet. And so they fled, ignominiously fled. And the Light Horse and Carbineers flew to the other side of the gun-pit and poured volleys after them.

Now there is sometimes a humorous side to the grimmest of human tragedies, even to the tragedy of war. And there was a humorous side to this. For the storming party, if the truth must be told, were not armed with the bayonet at all. They had nothing but their carbines. Stay, I had forgotten. There were four bayonets amongst the party, belonging to four Royal Engineers; and these worthy gentlemen had fixed their "knives" with as much noise as possible on receiving Edwards's order. Wherefore the 200 valiant men roared with laughter as they, headed by Colonel Edwards, leaped into the gun emplacement. That gallant officer might shake hands with himself, for he was one of the very select few who up to that

"WENT UP THE HILL LIKE CATS."

time could boast of having "outslimmed" the Dutchman. He deserved to be, as he was, first at the guns.

The sortie party found on the spur two heavy guns and a Maxim. The big fellows were a 6in. Creusot gun (or genuine Long Tom) and a 4·7 howitzer.* The Maxim could be taken away, and the big fellows must be rendered useless. Fowke, R.E., was now found useful. His sappers had brought the necessary plant, and they proceeded to bore holes in Tom and his little brother, and to insert in the same gun-cotton, to each charge of which they annexed a two-minutes' fuse. The stormers had, in the meantime, formed in close order round the emplacement to the Boer side, and greeted with volleys anything that looked like a Boer.

Fowke, R.E., was a handy man, and his job was soon finished. He adjusted his fuses, and then reported that everything was ready. The Maxim was led off captive, along with the breech-block of Long Tom, and everybody retired down hill except Fowke, R.E. That inquisitive officer wanted to make quite sure of the effect of a charge of gun-cotton upon the breech of a 6-inch Creusot gun, and ditto, ditto, a 4·7-inch howitzer; so he stayed behind in the gun emplacement to light the fuses with his cigar and watch the charges burst. He escaped whole. Then he was satisfied, and retired down hill also, quite pleased with himself, and having acquired, no doubt, much valuable scientific information, for they do not have much chance of acquiring such practical knowledge at the "shop." As for the condition of the Boer heavy ordnance, it needs no student of dynamics to imagine what those two guns were like after each of them had sustained the explosion of twelve pounds of gun-cotton in his breech and eight pounds in his muzzle.

The irregulars of ours, like most irregulars, were grand men at the looting. They found a dug-out cave, and in it boots and blankets and mackintoshes and various other welcome plunder. These they took away; and they also found some big 94 and 40-pound shells. These they rolled down the hill, and then themselves marched down also, but not until they had awakened the echoes of Lombard's Kop with three jubilant hurrahs for the Queen. The night was now far spent, and as the proud troopers marched back into the town the day had broken. The exploit was by this time known throughout the camp, for everybody guessed, when they heard the detonations, that the surprise had been entirely successful.

And as the stalwart Colonials swaggered into camp, bearing the breech-block of their old enemy and dragging the Vickers-Maxim, the whole force turned out to cheer them. It was a proud day for the South African troopers, these men who became soldiers when needed, as Englishmen used to do in time of yore—at the hour of the country's need. The employment of them had been somewhat of an experiment. At first it was thought that the local volunteers would be useful only as scouts and guides and so forth. But before long—in fact, as early as Elandslaagte, when the Imperial Light Horse advanced step for step with the Gordons—it was seen that these stalwart sons of the Empire could be trusted to assault a position as steadily as any trained soldiers. And the siege of Ladysmith had not been a fact for long ere it was discovered that the Colonial Irregular troops had all the other best qualities of the British soldier.

* This was a regular siege gun of something less than the fighting weight of our naval 4·7.

They could endure as well as dare, suffer as well as do.

And the cheerfulness of them, their *bonhomie*, the dare-devil way in which they stole out o' nights and raided the Boer storehouses, the hearty, liberal fashion in which they shared the loot with all and sundry, the style in which they accomplished all manner of fatigue duty and then helped others to accomplish theirs, soon made these mounted troops of the country the pride of the garrison, the pets of the British Tommy. They organised a tin-whistle band, they gave concerts, they played all sorts of tricks on the enemy. And this night's exploit, the silencing of the Long Tom, and the taking of the machine-gun, put a cap on their fame and their popularity. General White and his Staff visited their camps that afternoon and congratulated them upon their success. White himself was a daring, dashing soldier, as well as a tough, obstinate and skilful commander. This gun exploit was just the sort of thing he would have been in at himself had he been anybody but the commander of the garrison, and he, therefore, could appreciate the deed. And the Colonials blushed with pride through their swarthiness when their general thanked them in the Queen's name and told them that he never wished to command braver troops.

Not less remarkable than the bravery of the exploit was the perfection of its planning and the skill of its execution, as witnessed by the fact that only one man was killed and eight wounded.

And while the Imperials and the Carbineers were covering themselves with glory, the 19th Hussars lent a hand in the operation. They were not sent to capture a gun or storm a kopje; they were detached to do something in order to cover the movements of the stormers: to make a noise and a disturbance in another part of the Boer lines so as to draw the attention of the Boers away from Little Bulwhana and Long Tom. And in this they succeeded to admiration. There was a certain Kaffir kraal or cattle station used from time to time by the besiegers as cover for their marksmen, and thither the Hussars rode. They reached it without opposition, and promptly proceeded to set it in a blaze. The whole kraal was soon in a glow; and the Boer sentries saw it and woke up their comrades, and some fired shots. And the cavalrymen turned about and rode home. It was not much of an exploit, but it was a great deal better than doing nothing, or than sitting about in a trench being potted at by men a mile or two away.

The next day or, rather, the same morning that the Imperials returned with Long Tom's breech-block (December 8th) a cavalry reconnaissance was decided on—a reconnaissance in force. Partly this was by way of keeping men and horses bright and active; partly because General White had heard that the Boers had withdrawn a large number of men from the neighbourhood of Pepworth in order to send them to the south of the town so as to be ready to operate either against Ladysmith or against the Relief Column that was now being organised at Frere Camp. Wherefore at about 3.45 a.m. three regiments of cavalry, the Royal Irish (5th) Lancers, the 5th Dragoon Guards, and the 18th Hussars paraded in fighting trim. The cavalry had, by this time, done so much dismounted work that they felt as pleased as schoolboys on a holiday when they found themselves astride a horse once more, and with the prospect of a fight to boot.

They shook themselves in the saddle,

and at 3.55 a.m. trotted out of camp, through the town and on the road to the north. Their idea was to skirt Pepworth Hill and make for Modder's Spruit Station, where the enemy had all his stores, his waggons, and his railway rolling-stock. If these could be destroyed, the result would be better than the burning of all the Kaffir kraals in Natal.

But an hour's ride showed that the movement was doomed to failure. It was obvious that the enemy had been warned by some of those spies to whom reference has been made, and that he had taken his measures accordingly. With the easy mobility of his fluent force of mounted men the Boer general had brought up a large body of riflemen, and these lined the ridges overlooking the glens along which the cavalry moved. Shells began to drop round the squadrons, and it being certain that no surprise could be effected, General Brocklehurst gave the word to retire after less than an hour's riding. The troopers were sadly disappointed. They had come out for a dash and a scrimmage, for one more raid, for one more gallop with levelled lances through the Boer ranks; and, behold, they were told to turn back without a blow struck!

The danger now commenced to show itself. Some of the hills and ridges past which the Hussars and Lancers had ridden were crested with riflemen, who, true to their usual tactics, let our men ride by without a sign, trusting to rake them when they retired. The British cavalry is not a very large body, but there can be no question of its quality. The squadrons wheeled, spread out, and trotted back. Then the riflemen on the ridges opened a fire so hot and heavy that Mr. Nevinson of the *Daily Chronicle* declared he had never seen anything to equal it. Of its continuous character there could be no doubt. It seemed as though someone had turned on a big machine, a machine that went on ceaselessly spitting out bullets.

And through this hail the British horsemen rode without flinching. Their pace was great and their ranks widely spread, else it is difficult to see how they could have escaped disaster. As it was, they came off so lightly that everybody was amazed. One Hussar, a dare-devil fellow, accomplished a performance of a kind seldom seen. His squadron had to pass along the foot of a kopje exposed at no very great distance to a murderous fire. As they were passing, this man cantered out of the ranks and rode slowly zig-zag towards the enemy. A hundred rifles made him their target, a thousand bullets ploughed the earth around him and whistled past his ears. Meanwhile the squadron galloped on almost unmolested. Then the gallant trooper, having accomplished his object of drawing the fire upon himself and relieving his comrades, turned his horse round and galloped after the troop. The Mauser bullets still pattered about him; but it is pleasing, as it is marvellous, to be able to record that neither he nor his horse was touched. And so the cavalry returned to camp, not much pleased, but having one hero to boast of: a man who dared what few would dare—the concentrated fire at 300 yards of a hundred Boer rifles.

The bombardment now abated somewhat; for the two guns that had been blown up were just about the most troublesome of all the Boer artillery. They were also the nearest to the town, and the gunners had a full and uninterrupted view of the mark they aimed at.

When the siege of Ladysmith had become inevitable, Sir George White had

seen how Lombard's Kop dominated the town; and had intended to occupy it himself. It would have been highly inconvenient for him to do so; because it would have meant extending his lines by something like three miles—thus making them very thin indeed—but he had intended to take the risk so as to deprive the besiegers of a highly favourable position.

He was prevented from carrying out his plan, however, by the advice of certain artillery officers. These assured him, after surveying the kop, that it would be quite impossible for the Boers to drag up it and place upon it any guns big enough to reach the town. The British officers had not then learned the resourcefulness of these farmers. In fact, the early days of the campaign were spent by our military men in a state of blank amazement, not merely at the mobility of the Boer commandoes, but at the extraordinary mobility of their artillery. It was found that the burghers could carry their heavy position guns about with them at a speed quite equal to that attained by our light field guns; that they could drag them up mountains, and down again, could change their position in a single night, constructing emplacements by incredible labour.

As far as the Boer artillery round Ladysmith was concerned, the naval guns could probably have dismantled them as fast as they were put up, but for the fact that the quantity of ammunition was strictly limited, and had to be husbanded with care. Wherefore Captain Lambton was obliged to repress his energies.

STOCK FARM NEAR LADYSMITH.
(*Photo: J. H. Murray, Pietermaritzburg*)

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE IMPERIAL YEOMANRY.

AT the outset of the war there were many military experts who premised that the peculiar nature of the battle-ground and the well-known tactics of the Boers would require a force much more mobile than that usually sent out of this country. This point was pressed upon the commander-in-Chief by our colonists, but their offers of mounted infantry were declined by him. He preferred foot soldiers.

Our cavalry regiments were of fair strength, when augmented by their reserves. And everybody knew them to be splendid fighters. But those who knew the country and the foe went in for mounted infantry, who differ from cavalry in this respect :—Cavalry moves and fights on horseback, whereas the mounted infantry moves on horseback and fights on foot. This enables it to move rapidly, and in fighting to take advantage of cover. General Buller, who had a free hand in raising mounted rifles in South Africa, had a few of these whom he regarded as very efficient.

But when the foe by their rapid movements had succeeded in shutting in Ladysmith, the military authorities at home and at the front learned a lesson from experience. In other words, it took our authorities two months to learn that which was obvious to almost everyone else from the beginning of the war, and they then decided to raise a mounted force, to be called the Imperial Yeomanry. It was at once evident that their action commended itself to the nation at large.

The nature of the force, together with its necessity, were set forth in an official statement. This statement, marking the recognition by the Government of new methods, is important enough to be quoted as a historical document :—

"The Imperial Yeomanry is a new body, of which the nature and importance are not yet so clearly understood as, in the public interest, they should be. Her Majesty's Government regards the formation and the despatch of this force as one of the most pressing needs of the situation. The campaign has proved that a large proportion of mounted troops is needed to meet the Boer tactics and to give the fullest effect to the admirable qualities of our regular infantry.

"The new force of Mounted Infantry to be raised is to be called the Imperial Yeomanry, but enlistment in it is open on the same terms to everyone not in the regular Army or Militia who fulfils the prescribed conditions of efficiency

"The name Yeomanry has been retained because the Yeomanry can, without doubt, contribute a valuable nucleus of officers and men to the force. The Yeomanry, again, is held to be in touch with the classes from which many desirable recruits may be expected, and, further, it has an existing machinery of depôts, each with a staff, so dispersed over the country as to facilitate enlistment with a minimum of personal inconvenience.

"It cannot be too clearly understood that (1) there is no limit of numbers for

any one district or from any one Yeomanry regiment; and that (2) each company of 115 should comprise a large portion of volunteers and civilians, since otherwise it will not be possible to raise the required

THE PRINCE OF WALES INSPECTS THE IMPERIAL YEOMANRY.

numbers. No mounted corps will be accepted for service in South Africa from this country except as an integral part of the Imperial Yeomanry."

Details as to the equipment and enlistment were soon made public. Ten thousand men was the number aimed at from the beginning. Tenders were invited for the necessary equipment, which included such unusual articles as housewifes, worsted caps, puggaree muslin, clasp knives and lanyards, marlin spikes and wire nippers.

The Government allowed the sum of £40 for each horse, and £25 for the equipment of each man.

Immediately the scheme was launched it commended itself to the popular taste. Ere the call was fully made, it was heartily responded to.

The various regiments of Yeomanry—

some thirty-eight in number—generally regarded as forming an antiquated and merely ornamental part of the service, showed that there was "life in the old dog yet." In the course of a very few days the success of the movement was assured, and the country had the assurance of a body of troops of a character almost unique in its history. They were in many respects akin to the feudal levies who in the old times followed the banners of their lords. Local magnates in every part of the country took up the cause with great spirit, appealing to tenants, and friends, and neighbours to vindicate the local courage and the local honour. It was not a mere vicarious valour that was shown by the local peers and squires and other magnates. They were ready to move to the front themselves—and when not debarred, by conditions of age or health, did so in many cases. It is no exaggeration to say that all the noble and wealthy families of the country were represented at the seat of war or among the volunteers. To those conversant with local histories it soon transpired that the county families were to be to the fore in connection with the Imperial Yeomanry. Active steps were taken to organise help in money and otherwise without delay.

Even on the day that the Government asked for the formation of the new force, the papers reported numerous steps that had already been taken. Then it was seen that the rough riders of the country were prepared to face other dangers besides those of the hunting field, and that the yeomen of the country were not wholly devoted to the raising of cattle and turnips. The Prince of Wales consented to be the Colonel-in-Chief, and set the example of liberally subscribing to the general fund raised on behalf of the movement.

Old soldiers and young country lads, well known sportsmen, and not a few poachers, eagerly offered their services; the sons of tenant farmers and those of the lord of the manor, noble lords and young squires vied with each other in their efforts to secure entrance into the force.

It was not easy to gain admission—age, and height, and weight, and chest measurement had all to be taken into account, as well as general physical fitness. Then the men had to be able to ride and shoot. And, as many a volunteer found to his bitter disappointment, the tests were applied with considerable stringency. Some of the applicants wished to have one or other of the regulations set aside in their favour, and were, generally speaking, very earnest. One youngster pleaded that he was the eldest of a big family of boys, and would never be missed—he was sixteen, whereas the minimum age was twenty—and was ready to go out as a bugler, or in any capacity whatever. Unless report has lied, the lad went to the front after all, because he happened to make a mistake in telling his age on his next attempt.

Some of the rejected ones were very persistent in arguing the matter. One of these had a wooden leg, and insisted that it would make no difference either to his riding or his shooting—nay, upon the whole, it was rather an advantage, for if he was shot in the wooden leg *it would not trouble the surgeon, and if he could only get propped up anywhere, he could fire away as well as ever.* Another aspirant, being rejected on the ground that he had bad teeth, indignantly protested that he wanted to fight the Boers, not to eat them. Numerous incidents of this character took place in all parts of the Empire, and more than one brave and determined fellow went veritably

on the tramp from headquarters to headquarters in the vain hope of finding the regulations (or their administration) easier. One young fellow, after trying Warwick and Worcester, succeeded at Lichfield, and seemed as happy and exultant as if he had come into a big fortune. He came home to Selby Oak with the Queen's shilling in his pocket, and a look of satisfaction on his face, and a most martial air ; and he chuckled as he told his friends that he had "done" the War Office at last.

Ireland had no Volunteer regiments, but on this occasion she was not to be denied. The masters of hounds took the lead, and noted daring riders connected with the various hunts followed their leaders. In the course of a few days 132 applications for enlistment into the Dublin Company were received from well-known and competent men.

"GOOD BYE!"
(Photo: W. Gregory & Co., Strand.)

The "natural leaders of the people" were ready to lead. Dukes and belted earls, barons and baronets, knights and squires were among the earliest in the field. The heirs to vast estates and honoured titles were equally ready with the lads that follow the plough.

The occasion was unique, and so was the hearty response that came from England and Wales, and Scotland, and Ireland.

The three Yeomanry headquarters in Wales were kept busy. At Denbigh 63 men of the Hussars were passed for service immediately ; at Pembroke the first meeting showed 30 members of the Yeomanry, besides several outsiders. Generous offers of horses and money were made by the patriotic members of the Principality. The offers to enlist were greatly in excess of the number required.

Scotland, as full of enthusiasm, helped on the good work. Bang went many a saxpence, for the martial spirit was

[illegible] that at a meeting in Edinburgh all the mounted infantry volunteered for the front. The lads of the Northern and Western Highlands—of the Islands and the Highlands—were true to their traditions: the men of the Border counties proved themselves worthy sons and worthy sires: and the dwellers in the Midland and Lowland counties were equally ready for the front. They came from moors and lochs and glens, from farms and weaving-looms, from coaling hills and fair towns, to turn the shooting, which had often been so grand a display at Wimbledon and Bisley, to the use of beating the enemy of their country. To serve under Lowland lairds and Highland chiefs of fierce hearts and ancient lineage, they came as in the days of old and stood shoulder to shoulder. And not only the hearts of Scotsmen but the hearts of Britons all the world over warmed to the tartan. They enlisted to emulate and to help the Gay Gordons and the Black Watch, as became the countrymen of Campbell of Clive and Wauchope and Hector Macdonald and all the long line of heroes whose names are household words in the land whose annals tell of dirk and broadsword, of feuds and frays, and of blows that followed words so quickly that the sounds of both fell on the ear together.

England also was true to her traditions, and from Newcastle to Winchester, from Bury St. Edmund's to Land's End, the good men and true invaded the headquarters with proffers of good and true service to our Sovereign Lady the Queen. The various royal regiments were ready to do yeoman service.

The first meeting in Northumberland showed eleven donations of £1,000 towards the equipment. In two days 110 volunteers came; before a week had elapsed 150 of the Yeomanry Hussars had volunteered, and soon three companies were ready for the front.

In Durham the Earl of Durham led the way, and the required contingent was soon ready.

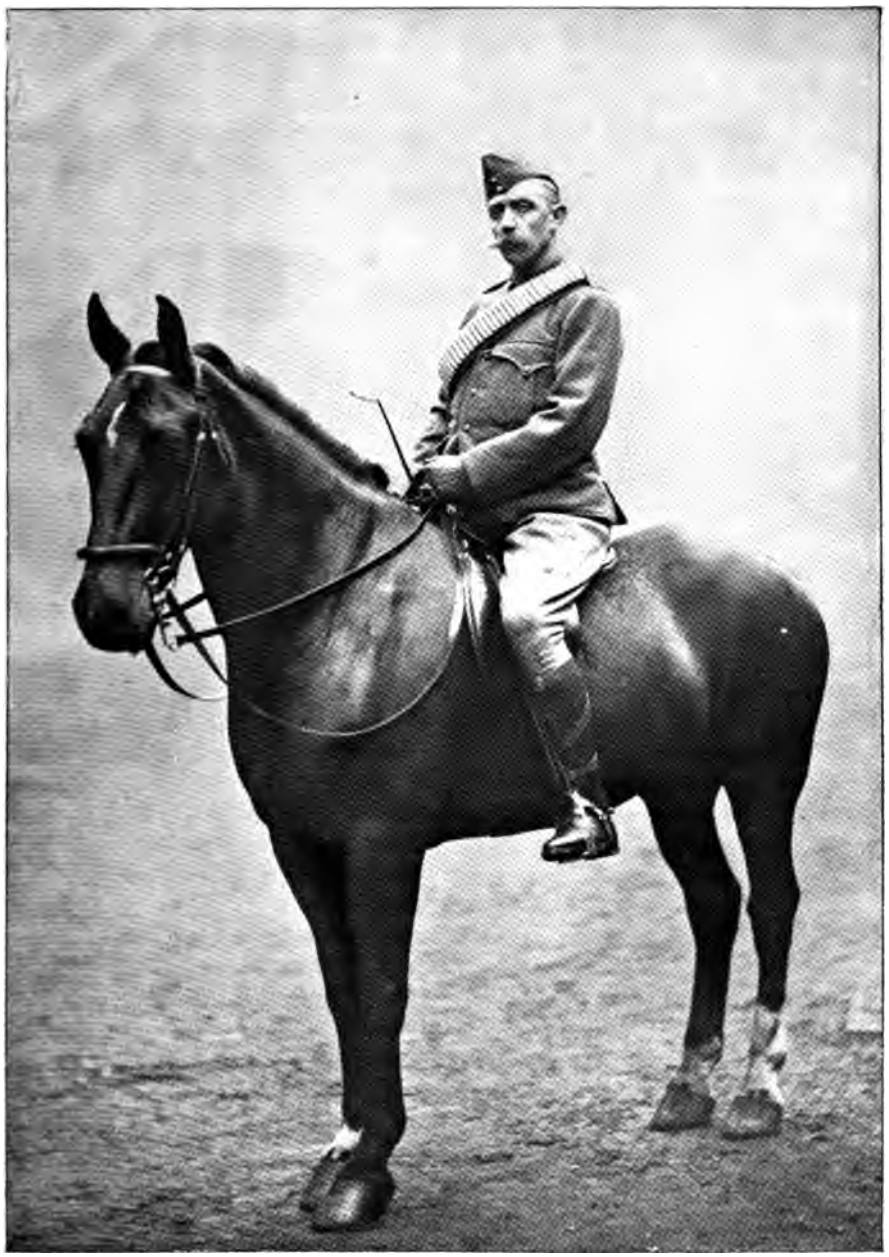
Cumberland and Westmoreland joined forces. Lord Lonsdale going into the matter with his usual heartiness, canvassing his tenantry, and arranging to send out some 300 carts to South Africa for transport service.

The three lord-lieutenants of Yorkshire put their heads together, and, with the Yorkshire Hussars and Dragoons as a nucleus, brought from the three Ridings a well-equipped force of Yorkshire "tykes," who would never lose any grip they once got. York and Doncaster were kept alive as the men from wold and dale and hill, as well as from the cities and towns, pressed their services upon the authorities, and, if need be, argued the matter out with them. In the neighbouring county there was the same alacrity to serve, the same generosity to find the means wherewith to equip the volunteers.

As in the Northern, so in the Eastern counties. The wise men of the East were less demonstrative, but equally staunch. In one troop of Hussars every man gave in his name for the front—and officers and men vied with each other in loyalty and pluck.

And so also it was in the West. The Earls of Chester and Grosvenor were at the head of the movement. In the Eaton troop thirty-two out of fifty-eight volunteered; and in one of the Hereford and Salop troops 90 per cent. did so. In about seven days they had got all the men they wanted—and the cry was "Still they come!"

In the North Midlands the Sherwood Rangers were most enthusiastic. Captain



A PRIVATE OF THE IMPERIAL YEOMANRY.
(Photo: W. Gregory & Co., Strand.)

Laycock (of the Newark troop), who was himself out with General French at Ladysmith, offered to find mounts for all who needed them. The heir to the dukedom of Devonshire offered to go out with the Derbys. In the Kidderminster district the men were all ready in a week. In Staffordshire the whole of the officers of the Queen's Own Royals volunteered, and the percentage of the men was very high throughout the regiment. Sir R. Hardy proffered a bounty of £20 per man towards equipment.

In the South Midlands, with London as a centre, the percentage of men of good social position was higher than elsewhere. Clubdom was almost denuded of its able-bodied single young men. The Duke of Cambridge's Hussars yielded 30 per cent. of volunteers. There were some 500 applications in about five days, and these included many ex-officers and others who had smelt powder in South Africa, as well as a number of others who were familiar with the country.

The dwellers in the ten Southern counties, from Kent to Cornwall, were by no means belated in their efforts. It was the same tale everywhere. Superabundant volunteers—yeomanry and civilians equally anxious to get to the front—many disappointed officers and men. No man shirking his duty, the only fear that of not being accepted, the only desertion that of desertion to the front.

And thus the men of all the counties of England rallied at their country's call. Smarter work was never done. Within a fortnight there had been more volunteers than were required.

And not only the men, but the boys—who were ready to be buglers, or anything that would bring them to the front. One would-be hero of eleven was made temporarily happy by having his name and address taken down at Birmingham.

A very few days served to get the work of mobilisation fairly begun ; and at the various centres drill, with riding and shooting, was the order of the day.

Meantime the country was doing its best for them. Employers in many cases not only engaged to keep situations open, but gave their men accepted for the Imperials a substantial present. One firm contributed £50,000 to the fund. Steamship companies offered free passages for men and horses. Offers were made of mounts, and guns, and ammunition, and field-glasses, and ambulances, and of a special hospital service of bedsteads. Precautions were also taken that every volunteer should have a life insurance policy for £250 for one year.

On January 27th the first contingent of the Imperial Yeomanry embarked at Liverpool on board the *Cavour* and the *Winifredian*. The men were from Yorkshire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, and Staffordshire, and totalled up to 905. They had with them 657 horses. The officers in charge were all well-known county men. The Lord Mayors of Liverpool and Sheffield and a distinguished company were present. The *Erie*, with men from Cheshire, Warwickshire, and Lancashire, embarked two or three days later at the same port. The Suffolk Hussars and the the Hampshire Carbineers sailed from Southampton at the same time. The work of embarkation was proceeded with as rapidly as could be arranged, considering the occasional hitches in the transport service. And amid local enthusiasm and national good wishes the first 5,000 men were sent to South Africa for their country's good. The time of their departure coincided with one of national

suspense and depression at the news of reverses to our arms ; but ardour was not checked in the least, and the men went off with hearts unshaken—"that well their duty knew."

The remainder of the Yeomanry followed at irregular intervals, being greatly hindered by delays in the transport service.

The student of history was reminded forcibly of the scenes that were witnessed in England when the Spaniard made to invade our shores in the reign of the Virgin Queen. But there were notable differences.

In those days the service was undertaken to defend the homeland against aggression, to keep the foot of the invader from the soil where freedom grew. In this case it was service offered to right the wrongs of far-away subjects of that Empire the foundations of which were laid in Elizabeth's day. Englishmen put forth their manhood then close by their native shores : the Briton of this day cheerfully volunteered to cross 6,000 miles of ocean.

And there was a further difference—and that most noticeable. Good Queen Bess could only appeal to the love and allegiance of Englishmen from Channel to Tweed, from Irish Sea to the German Ocean. Queen Victoria could call upon the united peoples of the two islands—the grim and fiery valour of the Scot, the dashing courage of the Irishman, to help the dogged stubbornness of England.

More. She could summon legions from the torrid and the arctic zones. From every continent of the earth. From every latitude and clime. All flocked to the recruiting ground, for love of freedom and to honour the Old Flag.

"All the old ardours in his blood
Woke like the flame from smitten steel
And, to himself revealed, he stood
A buttress of the commonweal."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE SIEGE OF LADYSMITH (*continued*).

HARDLY had the Boers recovered from the shock of the sortie of the Colonial forces than they were treated to another, the executants this time being Regulars. The plan of attack was much the same as before, except that the pounce was in another direction. As you will see from the map of Ladysmith and its environs (p. 95), there is to the north of the town a ridge called Surprise Hill, from which the enemy had been in the habit of throwing shells on the Rifle Brigade who held an advanced post (Observation Hill). The gun from which these shells came was a 40-pounder, a howitzer, and the ponderous but constant attentions of him were a distinct source of annoyance to the riflemen.

So they volunteered to go out and silence it. Permission was readily granted, and two hours before midnight the colonel of the battalion paraded five companies - about 500 men. Their orders were twofold Silence and the Bayonet. The riflemen selected turned out with joy and gladness. If they could blow up the howitzer, it would be great glory to the brigade. If not, they would in any case come to grips with the foe and give him a taste of the thing he liked least in the world—cold steel. Wherefore, accompanied by Major Wing, R.A., and Lieutenant Digby Jones, R.E., the latter carrying the explosive, they marched out in solid column from King's Post at ten p.m. on December 10th.

Arrived at Observation Hill, the surprise party had to lie down for an hour and a half, because the moon was up in a cloudless sky. But at the end of that time friendly clouds veiled the silver lantern, and the 500 rose and marched on. Not a word was uttered. The men scarcely seemed to breathe. The railway had to be crossed, and a wire fence cut ere the foot of the objective hill was reached; and, as the line here ran on an embankment, the task of marching silently was not an easy one. Every now and then a man caught his foot in a rail or a sleeper, and stumbled or slipped down the embankment, but by some miracle he kept his rifle from clattering. The railway crossed, half the party halted, as a reserve and rear-guard; and the others crept stealthily on to the foot of the hill. Then a momentary halt. Have they seen us? Listen! Apparently they have not, for there is no sound or sign of life on hillside or top. In a whisper the word is given: "Advance!" It is less than 400 yards to the top, and a tough climb. Scrambling over the stony ground, dodging the huge boulders that strewed the hillside, the 250 rushed up the slope. How they managed it so quietly was as mysterious to the observer as it was creditable to the men; but they did it so well that the climb was over ere ever a Boer discovered the presence of the foe. A voice with an Irish-American twang challenged "Who goes there?"

"Fix bayonets! Charge!" was the answer. It was the voice of Colonel Medcalfe. In a moment two hundred and fifty bayonets flashed out, and in another, two

hundred and fifty cheering Britons rushed across the flatness of the kopje's top.

Then came the crack of Mausers, the boom of cannon from neighbouring heights, and the frenzied cries of the Dutchmen as they ran for their lives. "The English are upon us!" And they ran out of their trenches like scared sheep, for they dreaded the steel. Straight as an arrow the sortie-party bolted for the gun emplacement, a kind of dug-out hollow in the plateau. Horror, the gun was not there! A cry ascends, a cry of rage; then another, of joy, as the monster is discovered on a little hill outside. The sappers lay violent hands on the howitzer, they place in breech and muzzle the explosive gun-cotton, whilst the Rifles form a circle round. The first fuse fizzles out. If at first you don't succeed, try another. The second fuse ignites, and with a report enough to wake the dead the gun-cotton explodes, and the howitzer is burst to splinters.

Following precedent (the precedent set three days before by the gallant Colonials) the 250 Riflemen yell themselves well-nigh hoarse with three cheers for the Queen—and one more, and another, and another. Then they formed up again and marched down the hill-side. But the Rifle Brigade was not to have the luck of the Imperials and the Carbineers; these won their way home practically scatheless. Not so the Regulars.

For the Boers (having precedent to guide them, also knew that the explosion and the shouting were preliminary to retirement) had stolen round the crest of the hill and were lining the sides, forming a kind of avenue down which the British must pass. And as the valiant 250 appeared on the crest and marched down the slope, a fire from right and left poured into them. But the Riflemen had done a great deed that night, and they were not to be flurried. Slowly and steadily they retired, as if reluctant to leave the ground. Boldly they faced to right and left, and answered the Dutchmen with a fusillade as deadly as their own. The night was dark, so that the sharpshooter was no better than any other rifleman; and the Boer shooting was wild as wild could be. Undoubtedly they were shaken by the suddenness of the attack.

Still they pressed inward, converging our men; and the order came, "Cease fire." This was nearly at the foot of the hill. The Boers were now all round the little storming party; and, emboldened by the cessation of our fire, pressed on, trying their favourite trick of speaking in English as if they were English soldiers; then, when the man addressed was off his guard, the Boer would throw himself on him, trip him up, and try to capture him. But the primeval simplicity of Tommy Atkins was wearing off. The trick was too stale; and when the Dutchmen tried it, the only answer they received was a foot of sharp steel. The little party of the brigade hurled itself at the encircling foe. A fierce shout, a fierce lunge, and the remnant of the 250 passed over the bodies of their enemies.

Still the Boers pressed on. There was one party that had stolen round the top of the hill, and was lying down right across the path of the Rifle Brigade, quite near the bottom of the slope; and when the British saw these they thought they had reached their own supports. So they marched right into the trap, calling out "The Rifle Brigade!" Answering cries, in English, came from the line in front, and the Riflemen marched on unsuspecting — when suddenly a volley was poured in at twenty-five yards' distance, and many men fell.

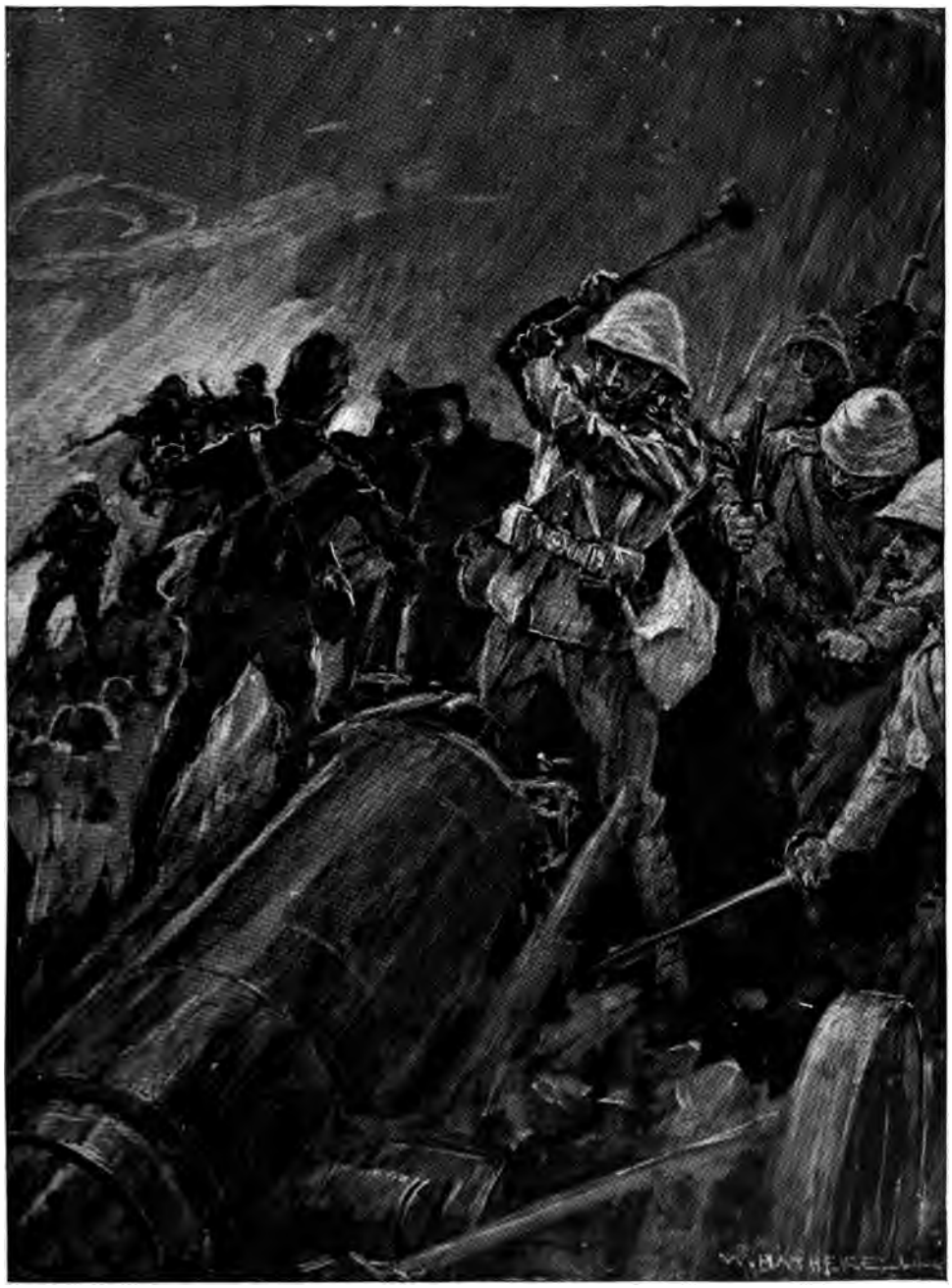
Startled, surprised, the little band reeled for a moment, and then charged home. Again the bayonet reaped its harvest, and many a Boer had fired his last shot. Some there were of the Transvaal Foreign Legion, that presumed to call itself the Irish Brigade, and these rushed at our men with rifles clubbed, shouting defiance. But the men of the Rifles thrust viciously, so that not a man lived who came within their stroke; and in ten minutes the whole attacking party had broken through and rejoined their comrades waiting near the railway.

Then daylight dawned, and the Rifles retreated stubbornly, firing as they went; and when the Boers drew too near, the fixing of bayonets was enough to drive them back. And so the storming party returned to their lines, galled by a heavy fire from the kopjes, but victorious. And their triumph was worth something, for it undoubtedly saved lives. The Boers were made to feel insecure at close quarters, so they never attempted to replace their damaged howitzer by a new one in the same spot. Fifteen lives were lost in the sortie, and forty-four more men were wounded and taken prisoners. The only wonder was that the operation was not more costly, seeing that in this case the Boers intercepted the retirement, the last part of which had to be performed in daylight. The whole performance redounded greatly to the credit of Colonel Medcalfe and his command, it raised the spirits of garrison and townsfolk, and considerably depressed the besiegers.

By this time Buller was at Frere, and his searchlight by night and heliograph by day sent messages to the besieged. The garrison learned that a strong force had assembled, under the personal command of the general commanding in South Africa; that an attack was to be made almost at once; and that Sir Redvers Buller felt confident of his ability to reach Ladysmith before Christmas. The garrison had no proper heliographic apparatus, but was able to make sunlight dots and dashes by means of an excellent shaving mirror, the property of an officer who once shaved. What with the two night surprises, the silencing of the three guns, and the prospect of speedy relief, the defenders of Ladysmith were, during the days from the 10th to the 16th of December, in a state of the most pleasurable excitement.

On the 14th a message came through. "I attack to-morrow. Shall begin by a bombardment." And all day on the 15th these battalions stand under arms, equipped as a flying column—the Devons, the Gordons, and the Manchesters, victors of Elandslaagte—waiting for the word that shall send them forth to fall on the retreating Boers. The word will come soon, in dots and dashes, from the hill-tops to the south. But the word never came. Next day a look-out man saw the twinkle of a heliograph. He took the message to headquarters; and, the decipher being applied, White read these words:—"I tried Colenso yesterday, but failed; the enemy is too strong for my force, except with siege operations, and these will take one full month to prepare. Can you last so long? If not, how many days can you give me to take up my defensive position? After which I suggest you firing away as much ammunition as you can and making best terms you can. I can remain here if you have any alternative suggestion, but unaided I cannot break in. I find my Infantry cannot fight more than 10 miles from camp, and then only if water can be got, and it is scarce here."

White refused to believe it. The



"THE SAPPERS LAY VIOLENT HANDS ON THE HOWITZER" (*p.* 359).

message was ridiculous. "Terms!" Surrender! No! The enemy had done this. They had captured the cipher, and were trying to trick him. But at last, sorrowfully enough, the message had to be read as true. White was in a burning rage. First he posted a proclamation in the town:—

"The General Officer commanding the Natal Field Force regrets to have to announce that General Sir Redvers Buller failed to make good his first attack on Colenso; reinforcements will not, therefore, arrive here as early as was expected. Sir George White is confident that the defence of Ladysmith will be continued by the garrison in the same spirited manner as it has hitherto been conducted, until the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief in South Africa does relieve it."

To Buller, White replied in the dauntless spirit of his proclamation to the garrison. It should be said that the question as to length of time he could hold out surprised him; because on the 30th November, in answer to the question, "How long can you hold out?" he had replied, "I have provisions for 70 days, and believe I can defend Ladysmith while they last."

The old Indian campaigner naturally thought that Buller had been smitten by despair at his defeat; wherefore he sent him a message calculated, if anything could do it, to raise his mind out of the depths of despair, and to inspire him to further effort:—

"Yours of to-day received and understood. My suggestion is that you take up strongest available position that will enable you to keep touch of the enemy and harass him constantly with artillery fire, and in other ways as much as possible. I can make food last for much longer than a month, and will not think of making terms until I am forced to." (Which meant, in effect, "not so long as I have a cartridge." Then a little encouragement—more like superior to subordinate than subordinate to superior.) "You have hit enemy harder than you think. All our native spies report that your artillery fire made considerable impression on enemy." (What liars these Kaffirs were!) "Have your losses been very heavy?" (Then a little good, soldierly counsel)—"If you lose touch of the enemy it will immensely increase his opportunities of crushing me, and have worst effect elsewhere. While you are in touch with him and in communication with me, he has both of our forces to reckon with. Make every effort to get reinforcements as early as possible, including India, and enlist every man in both Colonies who will serve and can ride. Things may look brighter. The loss of 12,000 men here would be a heavy blow to England. We must not yet think of it. I fear I could not cut my way out to you." There was more, but of no historical importance.

To this pugnacious despatch Buller replied by amending his message of the 16th, so that it read, after "Can you last so long?" as follows: "How many days can you hold out? I suggest you firing away as much ammunition as you can, and making best terms you can. I can remain here if you have alternative suggestion, but unaided I cannot break in." *Then follows the story about the Infantry.* "Whatever happens, recollect to burn your cipher, decipher, and code books, and all deciphered messages."

On the issue of White's proclamation, the beleaguered garrison were at first inclined to despair. Failure by Buller they had not counted on. But they were a

brave lot in Ladysmith in those days, civilians, soldiers, volunteers, and sailors. They knew that their town stood for Queen, for Empire, for the supremacy of the British race; and they were determined to deserve the name "Loyal Ladysmith." Wherefore the women, Britain's true daughters, once more arrayed themselves in glorious apparel and walked the streets with smiling faces. Their promenade was risky enough, in all conscience, but these women knew that if they put in an appearance of courage and confidence it would stimulate and strengthen the ardour of the men as nothing else could.

That night all Ladysmith slept calmly, and woke next day to renew the struggle and keep it up to the bitter end. Only White and Hunter and Ian Hamilton knew the full extent of Buller's disaster; and they were soldiers able to appreciate the difficulties of the task set that general They trusted to the patriotic spirit of the Empire to see to it that 12,000 men were not starved into surrender. Their faith in Buller was shaken; but they could not believe he would abandon them utterly. And they did not know how long it might be before he would be able to try again the passage of the Tugela.

Wearily, wearily the days dragged on. The sailormen now rarely replied to the bellowing of the Pepworth guns or the shells from Isimbulwhana. It was not from any want of will or lack of spirit that Jack kept silent. He was as frisky, as childlike, as devil-may-care as ever. He seemed to regard the whole "turn-out" as something in the nature of a frolic ashore; and nothing, not even the semi-starvation, could induce him to look at it in any other light. As for the Boers, the worthy tar regarded them with undisguised contempt and scorn. He thought little of their guns and less of their gunnery; and as for the other side of their martial prowess—well, it caused him to spit upon the ground.

You see, the English sailor, though he can play at long bowls with anybody, has a great aptitude for running alongside the enemy. In Nelson's time he used to range himself alongside and fire broadsides at about twenty yards distance or less. In the next naval war he will not do that, but he will outmanœuvre his foe and ram him. Those are his tactics. And he has some contempt for people who fight at a distance. Jack used to amuse Tommy Atkins vastly, and his sayings and doings were a source of never-ending delight to the whole camp. And the civilians, the women and children especially, felt comfortably secure when they beheld the Naval Brigade. The masterly first performance of Mesdames Bloody Mary and Lady Anne, when they silenced the Pepworth guns in twenty minutes, had bred confidence in Captain Lambton and his men—confidence not misplaced and never abated.

The days dragged on until Christmas; and, as the season of rejoicing drew near, the members of the garrison and the citizens resolved that the day should not go uncelebrated. There could not, of course, be much in the way of feasting; but there could and should be some gaieties, some rejoicings, to remind all of happier days. Everybody entered into the spirit of the season, and soon the town was in a bustle, preparing for the great day.

And first, all the luxuries to be found in the town were unearthed and sold by auction. Nor, surely, was there ever a madder or a merrier auction since the day some genius invented the shibboleth, "Going, going, gone!" There were still a few hens and ducks alive in the

RETURNING FROM THE CHASE

town, and their eggs fetched 9s. a dozen. A duck brought a guinea ; butter, in tins, 8s. 6d. a pound ; jam, 3s. 6d. a pound pot ; and those fortunate people who had managed to keep gardens in cultivation were able to realise small fortunes. Imagine, thirty new potatoes at over 1s. apiece, and three infinitesimal cucumbers for 5s. ! Condensed milk, of the kind usually sold at home for 4½d. a tin, was sold at 5s. And as for tobacco, it was for once the luxury of the wealthy. There were penny cigarettes going for £1 for twenty. Two or three pounds of tobacco in tins at 11s. to 23s. the pound. Not one cigar was to be had.

And so the soldiers' messes had a little Christmas cheer. Not the lavish feeding of a Christmas day in barracks, but still something to mark the day. And there were athletic sports. Well did the astonished Frenchman remark that the English notion of a holiday is to half kill himself. Certain newspaper correspondents and officers gave prizes for running, for mule riding, for a boat race—the winning crew to be entitled to the championship of the Klip River. On Christmas Eve the Boers derisively threw into the town shells filled with a concoction supposed by the besieged to be a parody on Christmas pudding, but on Christmas Day itself Long Tom ceased from troubling. There was peace that day.

And the children were not forgotten. There was a Christmas tree in the Town Hall, whither the little ones repaired in holiday attire. They were thin, most of these besieged bairns ; but they romped and played as only children can, and marched round the Christmas tree, and went home hugging the gifts of Santa Claus. And some of the mothers wiped the tears furtively from their eyes. And after the little ones had gone home to bed the elders stayed and made merry, and danced and sang as though there never had been a siege of Ladysmith. So they kept their spirits up and gathered strength for the long, stern task before them. "God rest you, merry gentlemen, let nothing you dismay ; Remember, Christ the Saviour was born on Christmas Day."

And on the hills the Boers sang hymns ; and they, too, prayed to the Prince of Peace. But next day the shells resumed their visitation with all the horrible monotony of a bombardment, and so continued for over a week. The New Year, 1900, was ushered in by 94-pound shells. There was, as yet, no word of Buller's further movement, and the cry went up "How long? How long?" As the days wore on the patients in the hospitals became more numerous. Those suffering from enteric fever especially increased, until they averaged thirty new cases a day ; and the garrison began to feel that its strength was being slowly sapped away. Yet nobody thought of yielding—least of all that strong, stern soldier who commanded.

The time was at hand when the garrison would need every particle of its strength, every bit of its fortitude. A time when the slopes of the line of defence would run blood, when the city would be at its last gasp—a time for herculean effort.

On the 5th of January, 1900, the Boer guns, now increased in number, began to shell the defences, not in the desultory fashion of the past two months, but seriously, steadily, uninterruptedly, hurling tons of shrapnel on and over the crests of the hills and ridges. White knew that some new move was afoot, and ordered the naval commander to send a gun to strengthen the southern defences.

[*H. A. Bryden.*

"OUTSPANNED" ON THE VELDT.

CHAPTER XXXI.

WITH METHUEN—AFTER MAGERSFONTEIN.

AFTER the defeat at Magersfontein, the relief of Kimberley was indefinitely postponed; and it became necessary for Lord Methuen to sit down, to recuperate his men, and to wait for reinforcements. So he pitched his camp at Modder River and waited.

Luckily, he had cleared his line of communications; and luckily, also, he had a railway all the way from his base to his camp, so that supplies without stint could be forwarded at any moment. From Modder River to the base camp at De Aar was a long string of little camps, filled with soldiers guarding the railway, and in this service were employed the Canadian contingent, the Australians (except the N.S.W. Lancers, who were with French), the Duke of Edinburgh's (Cape Colony) Volunteers, and half the South African Light Horse (the other half of whom were with Buller, and had been in action at Colenso under Colonel Byng).

These Sons of the Empire were men of whom any country might be proud—of Anglo-Saxon stock for the most part, though the finest corps of them all, the Canadians, included many French-descended sons of the Dominion. The South African Light Horse, whose work during the campaign was exceedingly fine, resembled nothing so much as one of those

filibustering gangs of piratical patriots who, under the Elizabethan admirals, were wont to make expeditions to the South Seas to plunder the Spaniard. Besides native-born Colonials, used to the life of the veldt, there were young men of all ranks and classes from England and Scotland; gentlemen and lawyers' clerks; the sons of peers, and merchant seamen from before the mast; a handful of Americans of the old fighting, adventurous strain; Australian bushmen and Canadian ranchers—in fact, as motley a crowd as you could meet in a day's march. Except the few Cape Colony men, the others had flocked to the seat of war at their own expense, trusting to find scope for their martial ardour in some of the irregular corps that were sure to be raised.

The officers were as great a mixture as the men. Byng, who commanded, was a captain in the 10th Hussars; Villiers, the second in command, came from the Royal Horse Guards; Fraser, the adjutant, from the 1st Life Guards; and the other officers were nearly all men who had held her Majesty's commission either in the Regular or Auxiliary forces. Such was Childe, a retired captain, who at middle-life left his comfortable home in the Midlands to seek a soldier's fame and meet a soldier's death, fighting for Queen and country. If there is one thing that the British officer can do better than any other thing it is the licking into shape of fighting material in the rough. And Byng and Villiers and the rest of them, in the short space of three weeks, transformed their motley crew into a disciplined fighting force. In another month the squadrons could wheel, and dress, and shoot, and skirmish to admiration; and the South African Light Horse ere long rivalled the Imperials themselves.

The position of affairs with the Kimberley Relief Column stood thus. They were lying at Modder River, about 130 miles from their base at De Aar, with a dotted line of detachments keeping the communications open. Within cannon shot to the north-east was the Boer position of Magersfontein, and straight ahead but further away was the Spytfontein position. Kimberley was but twenty miles from our camp. Its garrison could see our flashlight signals, and we and they sent messages one to another constantly.

On the east of the Modder camp, between Riet and Modder, was the village or township of Jacobsdal, a place that had sprung into importance as being the chief Boer depôt, and here the Boers were in some force. There was a good road to Jacobsdal, and the enemy had entrenched it, besides fortifying the village itself. Troops from the south were being hurried up to the front.

Now the Boers had many parties, whose base was Jacobsdal, working on our eastern flank, waiting only for an opportunity to pounce on our lines of communication, blow up a culvert, and tear up rails. At last one of these parties determined to strike a blow. It had penetrated as far as Zoutspan's Drift on the Orange River, and was about to cross that river and wind round between the camp there and De Aar, when intelligence of the movement was brought to Colonel Miles, the officer in command of the line of communications. He at once sent out half a company of Mounted Infantry, under Captain Bradshaw, and sixteen of Rimington's Guides, to drive them off if only a small party, and merely to reconnoitre if a large party.

On the morning of the 13th December the seventy men set out, pleased at the prospects of a brush with the enemy.

And here occurred one of those lamentable mishaps that brought so much discredit on our officers during the campaign, and resulted in the loss of so many valuable lives. If there was one thing that a party of this kind ought to do, it is to scout keenly and carefully, to feel its way and trust nothing to appearances. But this was not what our officers were in the habit of doing. They went on quite cheerfully, blundered into messes, and then trusted to bravery to get themselves and their men out. So it was here; the troop rode on and on until it rode straight into the enemy!

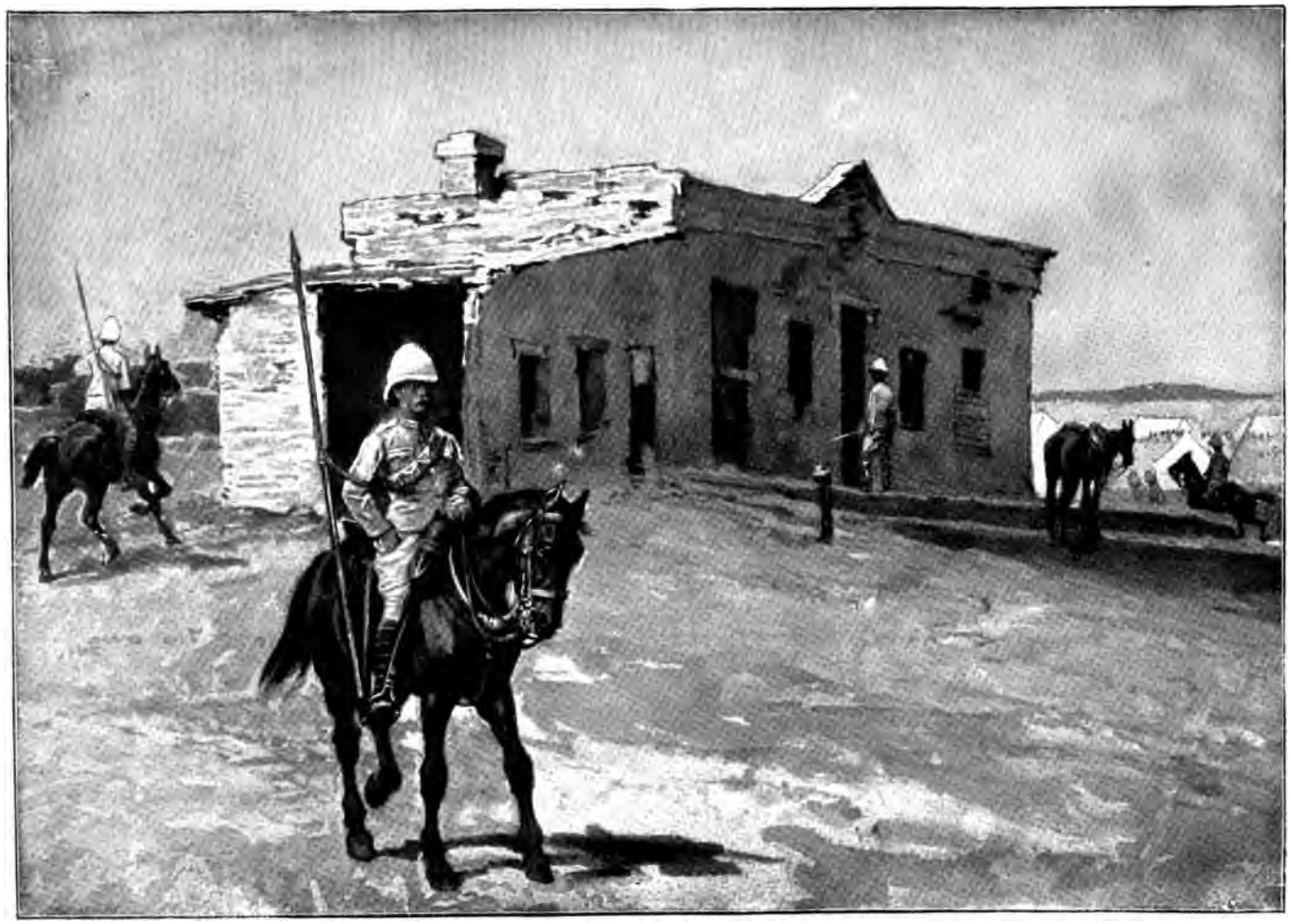
There might have been a thousand Boers for all that our men knew to the contrary. Fortunately there happened to be no more than two hundred. What was to be done? The ready foe promptly took cover and fired, shooting poor Bradshaw stone dead; and then the little British force, outnumbered and surprised as it was, resolved to fight it out. Well did Rimington's Tigers deserve their name that day. They crept from point to point, they shot as few Boers, even, could shoot. They stole round the enemy's position and enfiladed it, what time the Mounted Infantrymen spread themselves out over the veldt and made it hot in front.

The Free Staters soon had enough of it, and sullenly retired. They prepared to trek. Some of them had been shot, and their bodies were put in the waggons; others had been wounded, and these also were conveyed away. The waggons went first, with killed and wounded and stores, under a guard of about half the force, while the other half remained to hold our men back. The manœuvre was accomplished in safety, and the British patrol returned to camp, bearing the body of their dead captain.

Commenting on this action, Sir Redvers Buller sorrowfully remarked: "I suppose our officers will learn the value of scouting in time, but, in spite of all one can say, up to this (December 28th) our men seem to blunder into the middle of the enemy, and suffer accordingly."

From this time (December 13th) there was no fighting of any moment for a fortnight. The Canadians moved up from Orange River, where they had been doing Army Service work, to Belmont, where they joined the Australians. Every now and then Methuen shelled Cronje's position at Magersfontein with the lyddite of the naval guns, but the men at Modder River were, for the most part, simply engaged in the work of recuperation after their harrowing experiences. There were cricket and football matches, and polo matches between the officers; there were parades and sham fights; and on Christmas Day the whole camp rested and feasted. Supplies were plentiful, the camp was well watered, and there was very little sickness. Only the Highlanders kept to their tents, and mourned their dead.

The next move was made by the Colonials. At Douglas, a place to the west of the railway, a large force of rebels had gathered, had taken possession of the village and fortified the hills around. It was decided to give them a lesson; and a mounted force was sent to administer it. To the great joy of the Colonial troops, some of their number were selected for the work in hand; and on the last day of 1899, two hundred and forty mounted riflemen, with supports of two companies of the Cornwall Light Infantry, a company of Canadian infantry, two guns of a horse battery, and four machine-guns, started out from Belmont at noon. The mounted troops consisted of Queenslanders (200



CAVALRY STAFF HEADQUARTERS, MODDER RIVER.

strong), and a troop of forty Mounted Infantry of the Munster Fusiliers. The Toronto Company of the Canadians (100 strong) were conveyed in waggons, drawn by horses, so as to be able to keep up with the mounted troops. An ambulance sent by the colony of New South Wales accompanied; and the whole force was under the command of Colonel Pilcher, of the Bedfordshire Regiment.

The plan was for the mounted men and artillery to push on ahead, leaving the 200 Cornish infantry to follow on foot and secure the rear.

Here was a force as mobile as any of President Kruger's, and as hardy. The scouting was careful, for Colonel Pilcher meant to effect a surprise if he could; yet between noon and sunset twenty miles had been covered. A few farms were passed on the way; and at every one of these the British leader left two men, with orders not to allow anybody—white, black, or brown—to go out of the farmhouse. No Boers were encountered the first day, and at night the party encamped at the farm of a loyalist. Here he was not far away from the rebel laager at Sunnyside, commanding the approach to Douglas, and at 6 a.m. the next day (January 1st, 1900) the mounted troops and artillery rode out to get at the enemy.

The rebels were strongly entrenched in a line of kopjes running north and south; but, thanks to the precautions taken in keeping all natives shut up, they had no warning of Colonel Pilcher's approach. That gallant officer, leaving his men behind the shelter of some rising ground, went forward himself to reconnoitre, and soon decided on his plan of action. He detached the Toronto men and the Mounted Infantry with the two-horse guns to make a detour to the right, which would bring that column on the enemy's flank. Major de Rougemont, who had had experience in the Soudan, was to lead this flanking movement. The Queenslanders were to make an attack in front.

In front of the enemy's position there were other ridges of kopjes, scrub coloured, on any of which there might be a rebel picket, wherefore some of the Queenslanders were sent out to scout. They crept through the scrub, and as they reported "All clear," the column marched forward until the final ridge, only divided from the enemy by a valley, was occupied. This was at about 11 a.m.

When De Rougemont had made his detour he found himself in a valley, at the other side of which rose the rebel strongholds; and half-way between him and them he espied a low, rocky ridge, running parallel with the kopjes at a distance of 1,200 yards. This was the key of the position, and quick as that thought passed through his brain the gallant major ordered his guns and the Mounted Infantry forward. They rode at a rare pace, gained the shelter of the ridge, and in two minutes a couple of shells soared into the rebel laager. It was a surprise. The first shell fell a little short, the second dropped fairly into the laager, bursting in about the middle of the tents. Instantly the rebel camp was alive. Men swarmed up to the kopjes in hot haste, while shell after shell burst with unerring accuracy over the tents. Up came the Canadians, and dashing across the open, lined the crest of the ridge where the guns were posted. Soon the true sons of the Empire were in action, loading and firing coolly and accurately, and making the kopjes of her Majesty's rebels alive with humming bullets.

Meanwhile the Regular Mounted In-

fantry party worked along in the scrub round the right, crawling and dodging from cover to cover, until at last they had worked right round the enemy's flank. The move was a good one, for the Mounted Infantry were few in number ; but Lieutenant Ryan, their commander, led them with the greatest possible judgment. De Rougemont's force had done more than it was ordered to do : for it had not only turned the enemy's right flank, but held him in front as well.

Now Pilcher moved off with the Queenslanders to the left. Carefully scouting ahead, he managed to arrive at a point on the other flank of the enemy ; and having reached it, he dismounted his men for the attack. In two companies, one in the front and one well out on the left, the Australians pushed up the long slope, at the top of which the kopjes stood. Soon the bullets whistled overhead and ploughed up the ground in front—the baptism of fire of the Queensland Volunteers. Then it appeared how thoroughly British the Australians are—you could not have mistaken them for anything else. The first whizzing bullets always seem to have the same effect on the British soldier—they cause him to joke. And so it was with the Queenslanders : they jested and "chaffed" the whole way up the slope, until, if it had not been for the slouch hats and feathers, you would have sworn it was the Northamptons or the Rifle Brigade. It has often caused comment, because it seems a very odd thing ; yet it is the fact that British infantry never behave better than in their first fight. And these chips of the old tree, these Queensland lads, stood the fire as coolly as though it were a sham fight.

In one thing they excelled the regular infantryman, and that was in taking cover and shooting from it. Your Queenslander shoots on sporting principles — that is, when he sees something to shoot at, and not otherwise. He did not, as Tommy Atkins sometimes does, simply "blaze away" at so many hundred yards. And the reason was, no doubt, that most of the Colonials had been brought up in the open country, where shooting was plentiful, and had been taught to handle a gun since boyhood ; while Mr. Atkins, as a rule, has never had a gun in his hand until he joins the Army.

And so the rebels were gradually hemmed in. One company of Queenslanders and the Mounted Infantry were working round their two flanks, the Canadians held them in front on the right, and the other company of Queenslanders in front on the left. Bell, of the Canadian force, had his Maxims in working order by now, and was sending a perfect torrent of lead up the face of the kopje, while the two Horse guns threw shells into the laager and on the hill tops.

What with the steady volleys of the stalwart sons of the Dominion, the sniping of Ryan's men, and the calm, deliberate stalking of the Australians, the rebels soon had enough of it. On the right their fire slackened and then died away. Under cover of the Maxims and shell fire the Canadians rushed down from their ridge, across the open, and up the kopje. The enemy had, however, fled from this part of their position, and had got clean away, but leaving their dead and wounded on the ground. The Queenslanders were more fortunate. They retrieved their game. For, the enemy being now quite subdued and endeavouring to make off, the Australians rounded off a whole batch of them and captured thirty-five.

It was an auspicious opening of the New Year ; and the Colonials rejoiced, as

THE NAVAL BRIGADE CARRY A BROKEN GUN UP A KOPJE.

well they might, that it was they who had struck the blow. The operations had been conducted with singularly little loss owing to the great judgment displayed alike by officers and men and to the precautions taken to secure secrecy. Indeed the only casualties occurred when the Queensland 200 were being moved to the position from which they commenced the attack. Lieutenant Adie, of the Queenslanders, and a patrol of four men had ridden out scouting.

Suddenly they came upon half a dozen mounted men. The patrol covered these in an instant with their rifles, and Adie demanded, "Are you friends or foes?" The men made no reply, nor made any show of resistance. But out of the scrub a dozen rifles spoke, fired by some dismounted rebels in concealment. Adie fell dangerously wounded, and a private (Victor Jones was his name) dropped dead. The remaining three fired and made to retire. One of them, Butler, raised the lieutenant on his own horse, and another, Rose, went to catch the officer's charger. Rose was shot in the leg, and his horse was killed under him, but ultimately the patrol got out of shot.

Next day when the little band of Britain's sons rode into Douglas, whose loyal inhabitants had been for more than two months suffering under the tyranny of rebel government, there was cheering and waving of flags and handkerchiefs and tears of joy from the women; and the sturdy band from Toronto and the sunburnt lads of Australia felt proud enough that they had brought relief to their brethren in this far corner of the Empire. And the rebels were made to feel that, though Britain might move slowly, yet she struck surely. The victory of Sunnyside was not a great one from a military point of view, perhaps; but its moral effects were great and far-reaching. For it did more than anything had done up to that time to stay the contagion of rebellion.

And it was the rebellion of the Cape Dutch that constituted the real danger—not the armies of the Allied Boer Republics.

Reconnaissances and raids by cavalry and mounted infantry now became the order of the day. While Pilcher was making his raid on Sunnyside and Douglas, Major-General Babington, with a brigade of cavalry from Modder River, was operating in conjunction with him to the north, ready to stave off any reinforcements that might be sent by Cronje from Spytfontein. But none were sent. And the week after (January 9th) there was another joint move—this time into the Free State. General Babington took out two regiments (9th and 12th Lancers) of cavalry, some mounted infantry, and a battery of the Royal Horse Artillery. He struck out in an easterly direction, cut the wire fence which divided Cape Colony from the Free State, and rode into the enemy's country for the first time.

Meanwhile eighty men of the Victorian Rifles swept the country in a south-easterly direction from Enslin, with the object of meeting Babington late in the day, which they did. But before the meeting the Australians had a rare stroke of luck. They descended upon a Dutch farm, only to find that its owner had just fled, and that in such haste as to leave his dinner behind in the pot and oven. The Victorians did honour to the entertainment. They did not enjoy another meal of that kind for several days. The united forces bivouacked that night in the open, and the next day thoroughly searched the country for thirty miles round without meeting

an enemy. Everywhere the farmers fled before them, driving away their stock; and, after waiting about for some time on the off-chance of a skirmish, the brigade rode back to Enslin. This was a typical reconnaissance in force.

Besides this kind of thing, there was not much to be done in Modder River camp except routine work. True, the 4·7 guns of the sailors played on the Boer position daily, and the balloon went up to point out positions to be shelled; but this grew monotonous, and all the men in camp began to pray for the moment when Hector Macdonald and "Bobs" should arrive at the Cape. Macdonald was, of course, to go to Modder River camp; but there was some doubt whether Lord Roberts would come and take charge of the campaign at the Cape or would go to Natal and superintend the relief of Ladysmith.

Twice there occurred curious night alarms. On both occasions, in the very middle of the night, when it was black as ink, the Boer trenches at Magersfontein broke out into a blaze and furious crackle of musketry, which continued for about half an hour. The explanation was simple. Some burgher, sleeping in the trenches, woke up, looked out, thought he saw figures moving in front, woke up his comrades, and began to fire with all his might. Soon the whole garrison was awake and blazing away, while the British, starting from slumber, wondered what on earth the noise was all about.

These incidents amused Tommy Atkins mightily, and formed the subject of camp jokes for many days; but for the most part the troops held gymkhanas and sports and cricket matches, and waited for the coming of "Bobs" and that valiant Scotsman, "Fighting Mac."

On January 10th Lord Roberts arrived at Cape Town, and a fortnight later General Macdonald reached Modder River camp.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE ASSAULT ON LADYSMITH.

SATURDAY, the 6th of January, 1900, was a great day in the annals of the war, a day of storm and stress, a day of fiercest conflict for the heroic garrison of Ladysmith, of greatest anxiety for the Empire. Few of the generation of Britons will forget the day when White flashed the message to Buller, "Hard pressed"; and the electric wires sent the words round the world. It was a day that tried the stoutest-hearted of that fever-stricken band who upheld the flag in North Natal; a day that cost the Transvaal—ay, and Britain, too—some of her best and bravest.

COLONEL DICK-CUNYNGHAM.
(*Photo: Edwards.*)

For that was the day on which the burghers made their one great effort to beat down the resistance of those who had so long defied them.

We have already told of the state of the garrison, enfeebled by bad feeding and want of sanitation, by dysentery and by fever. The men were by this time gaunt and haggard from hunger and lack of sleep and disease; bearded, too, with stubbly hair on chin and lip; almost bootless; with clothes ragged and tattered; worn by the monotony of the bombardment; weary with constant watching; straining their eyes to the south looking for the relief that came so tardily. Yet these men were to show themselves true-bred whelps of the old lion—sick, perhaps, but still with teeth and claws.

The night of January 5th was pitch dark. No moon, no stars showed light upon Cæsar's Camp and Wagon Hill, where the soldiers lay in their trenches guarding the slumbering town. That afternoon a large party of Boers, under Villiers, of the Free State, moved quickly up from the Tugela on their little ponies, and called a halt under the shelter of the hills opposite the southern and south-western defences of Ladysmith. A council of war had been held by the Republican commanders, and there Villiers had urged upon his colleagues that Ladysmith was not to be captured by bombardment; that it would take too long to starve her into submission; that Buller would be on the move again ere long; that the capture of Ladysmith was of the utmost importance, because it would set their whole force in Natal free to meet Buller; that the capture would

have vast political consequences, and would kill British prestige—already half-dead—in South Africa. That there was only one way of taking Ladysmith—to wit, by assault. A surprise, a sudden rush might do it in a few hours. Who would lead the burghers to meet the English hand-to-hand, to stand the push of their bayonets? He would. He, Villiers. He had opposed this war; but since it had been undertaken he was willing to risk his life. And he doubted not that he could soon find a sufficient storming party like-minded with himself. The counsel of the Free Stater prevailed. An assault was resolved upon, and the commandant who proposed it was sent to lead the stormers.

The positions selected for attack were the two hills known as Cæsar's Camp and Wagon Hill, the two most isolated of the British positions. A glance at the map of Ladysmith* will show that Wagon Hill and Wagon Hill West protect the town on the south-west, and Cæsar's Camp on the south-east, the three being connected by neks. An enemy in possession of either stronghold could command Ladysmith so as to make it untenable, as he would be only 3,000 yards away in the one case and 3,800 in the other. Moreover, between the town and these heights there is no ridge or hill capable of fortification, for between them and the loop in the Klip River which runs round three sides of Ladysmith is an open plain. The nearest Boer fortifications were Middle Hill and a flat-topped hill of great height called by our soldiers Mounted Infantry Hill—both to the south. The southern slope of Wagon Hill is very steep, strewn with boulders and much cut up by deep and frequent nullahs, or dongas, affording excellent cover for riflemen; and the ground between it and Middle Hill is rough for the most part, excepting always an open piece of about 800 yards.

Cæsar's Camp is separated from Bulwhana on the east of it by a plain, through which the Klip River winds its serpentine course, and has on the south a stream, called Fouries Spruit, running at the bottom of a deep ravine; and on the other side of this ravine the Boers had a position on three small hills. On the night of the 5th of January Fouries Spruit was almost dry. From the west end of Wagon Hill West to the east of Cæsar's Camp the distance is, as near as possible, three miles.

On the night of January 5th, the defence of Cæsar's Camp was in the able hands of the 1st Manchesters, with a Colt automatic gun, and not far away was a field battery. The Manchesters, old and tried warriors by this time, put their faith in sangars built of loose stones, a kind of defence learned from the hillmen of the North-West Frontier of India; and behind and within these breastworks the battalion was sheltered. It is not to be imagined that there was a full battalion of the regiment—had there been anything of the kind the story which is about to be written would have been a short one. There was not even a half-battalion in the camp at the time. Elandslaagte, and Farquhar's Farm, and snipers, and typhoid had accounted for some 700 out of the 1,000. At the foot of the hill, a place known as Fly Kraal served as the camp of the gay and gallant Gordons.

The Wagon Hills were garrisoned by half the battalion of the 60th (King's Royal Rifles) and the Imperial Light Horse, heroes of the first gun-wrecking sortie and of many another exploit. Adventurers all. Men who fought, some for glory, others for hatred of the Transvaal and its Government; some for defence of their homes,

* See page 378.

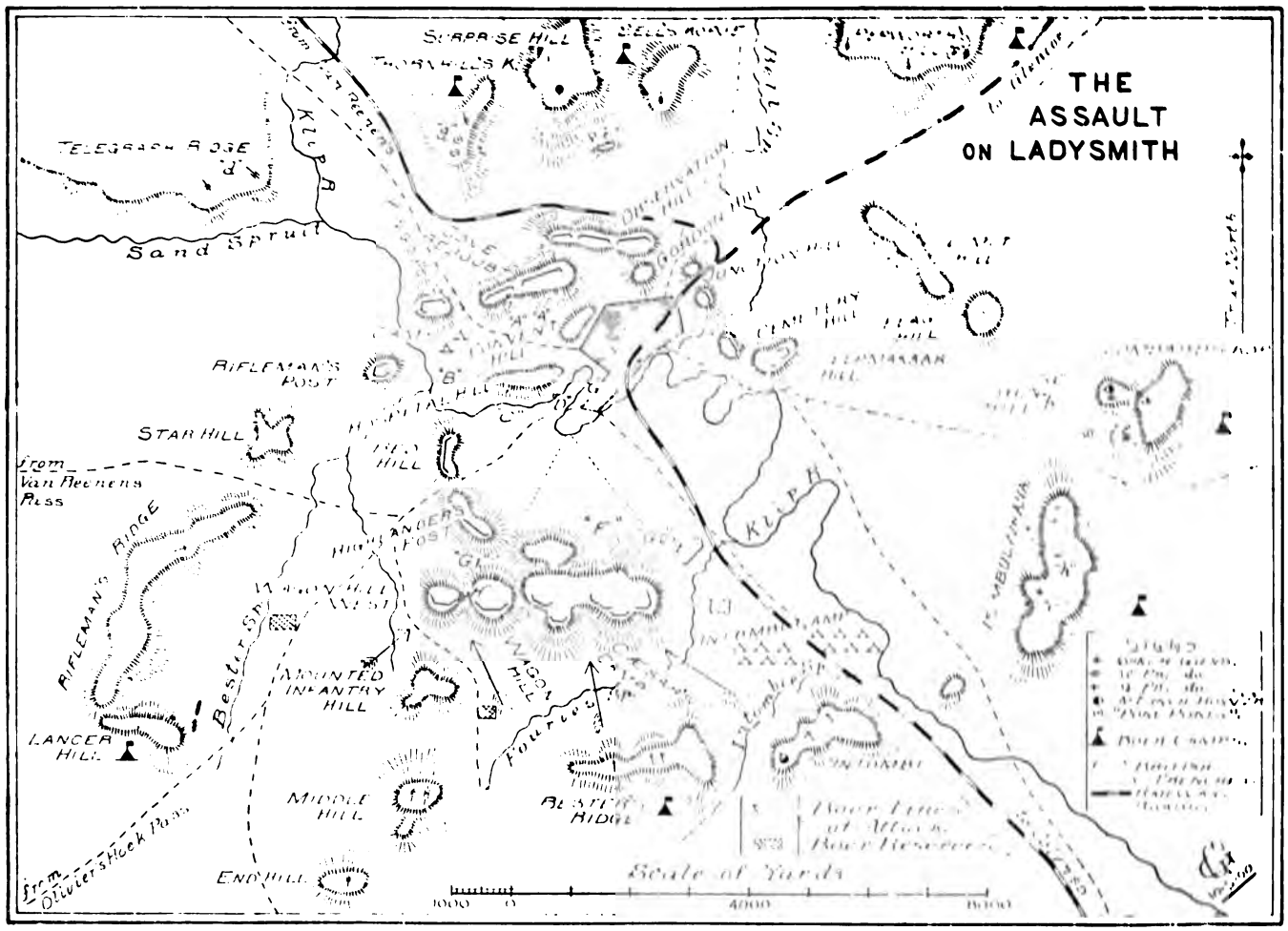
others simply because they loved to fight. But, whatever their motives, be they single or be they mixed, there is no doubt of one thing—they fought hard and well. There was also that night on Wagon Hill a working party of sappers under Lieutenant Digby Jones, R.E., the same young gentleman of twenty-two summers who had hoist with a petard of gun-cotton the gun on Surprise Hill: a cool, self-reliant officer with an old head on his young shoulders. The working party included six of the Naval Brigade and a handful of Gordons and King's Royal Rifles, and the work in hand was the fixing of a naval gun emplacement. For, as has been said before, General White had an inkling that an attack would be delivered ere long. He expected it to be delivered on Wagon Hill under cover of the Boer heavy guns on Middle Hill, and he had sent Jack, with one of his pets, to prevent the argument from being too one-sided; and the little band of engineers and sailors and infantry men was working in the dark to make an emplacement for the piece. Wagon Hill was dotted with sangars of stone and with trenches digged by the Imperial Light Horse.

Having thus surveyed the ground, let us see what was happening in the Boer lines.

The plan of attack arranged by Villiers was this. Two commandoes of about 500 men each were to form the storming-party, or, rather, the storming-parties, for the attacks on the two positions were to be almost entirely independent of each other. And so on the afternoon of the 5th (January) 500 burghers, stalwart men and courageous, assembled behind Middle Hill. Another 500 gathered at the back of one of the three kopjes aforementioned on the south of Fouries Spruit. Those were to attack the Wagon Hills; these, Cæsar's Camp. Those were the burghers of the Heidelberg commando; these Villiers's own men, the commando from Harrismith in the Orange Free State. We record the place of their habitation because these were the only men of all the Boer levies who ever dared to attack the British infantry, who ever dared, of their own initiative, to engage the British soldiery at close quarters. All honour to them!

Just after midnight the two contingents assembled under arms, sang a hymn, and then set out in perfect silence on their tremendous task. Four thousand of their comrades followed at some distance, ready to support the attack by rifle fire and to rush up to secure the positions once the storming-parties had obtained a foothold. Let us first follow the fortunes of the 500 who marched on Cæsar's Camp. They steal along in the darkness, round the foot of the kopje, along the bed of Fouries Spruit, up the ravine. Hist! There is a British sentry on the hillside! Sweep round, sweep round. Give him a wide berth! He cannot see the men who creep through the night, though they can see him, for he is a man bred and reared in a country where men never walk in the dark—they have gas-lamps and electric lights to guide them by night, while these Harrismith farmers, when they wander over the veldt by night shooting and hunting, have to use such light as Heaven gives. The sentry cannot hear them, either, for they are barefooted.

And so, unobserved, the stormers climb the rugged slope until they reach the plateau on the top. They see before them the breastworks of the Manchesters; and, splitting themselves into parties of about 100 strong, they rush at, and over, and into the sangars. A shout, a shot; and the assault of Ladysmith has begun. The Manchesters in the outlying sangars, over-



MAP OF THE ATTACK OF JANUARY 6TH.

whelmed and surprised, receive the Mauser bullets at pistol-shot distance. Some few manage to escape in the darkness, but the rest, save one party of sixteen in an isolated advance sangar, are shot, or taken prisoners, or clubbed by the butt-ends of the farmers' guns.

But now the alarm is given. The Colt gun is loaded. The Manchesters in the other sangars load their rifles and fix bayonets, and, as the Dutchmen rush at them, pour forth deadly volleys. It is weird, this fight in the dark. You see something that looks like a shadow. You fire at it, and it disappears. The man next to you suddenly cries aloud, "I'm hit!" and drops; stricken to death by a bullet from out the darkness. Quick! Someone bolt to the Gordons' camp. Tell them there is an attack in force. Tell them to hurry up reinforcements, or the position is lost. By this time the Boers have started their old game. They are lying down, creeping from boulder to boulder, making use of our sangars that they have taken for cover, and are pouring in a deadly hail of bullets from positions of absolute security. Once or twice they creep close and then try a rush, but the little Colt barks vigourously, and the Lee-Enfields sweep the plateau. One or two reach the sangars, and the cold steel is their reward.

Now there is a tramp of feet from the north, coming up the townside slope of the hill. Who's that? The Gordons—three companies! And the Manchesters breathe more freely, for they know not how many of the enemy have gained a footing on the ridge, nor how their comrades in the out-lying sangars have fared. Captain

TABLE OF REFERENCE TO THE MAP OF THE ASSAULT ON LADYSMITH.

POSITIONS OF THE GARRISON.

HELPMAKAAR HILL ... 1st Devonshire Regt. 2 Maxim-Nordenfeldts.
CEMETERY HILL ... 1st Liverpool Regiment; 13th Field Battery.
JUNCTION HILL ... 1st Gloucester Regiment; One 4·7 Naval Gun.
GORDON HILL ... Naval 12-pounders.
OBSERVATION HILL ... 1st Leicestershire Regiment
COVE REDOUBT ... Half 2nd Rifle Brigade; 69th Field Battery; One 4·7 Naval Gun.
KING'S POST ... } 2nd King's Royal Rifles.
RIFLEMAN'S POST ... }
RED HILL ... 1st Royal Irish Fusiliers.
HIGHLANDER'S POST ... Part of 2nd Gordon Highlanders; Two Naval 12-pounders.
WAGON HILL WEST ... Imperial Light Horse; Part of 2nd Gordons; Squadron 18th Hussars.
NEK BETWEEN WAGON HILL AND WAGON HILL WEST } Mixed Working Party and Naval Gun Emplacement.
WAGON HILL ... 1st King's Royal Rifles.
CÆSAR'S CAMP ... 1st Manchester Regt. Half 2nd Rifle Brigade; Part of 2nd Gordons; and Natal Mounted Volunteers.

"A" "A"—5th Dragoon Guards; 5th Lancers; 19th Hussars.
"B"—Mounted Infantry; 67th Field Battery.
"C"—18th Hussars.
"D"—Imperial Light Horse.
"G"—Camp of 21st and 53rd Field Batteries.
G 1, G —Second positions of 21st and 53rd Field Batteries.
"E —Border Mounted Rifles; Natal Police; Natal Carbineers.
"F —42nd Field Battery
"H"—Working Party and Naval Gun Emplacement.

THE BOER GUNS.

"a," "b," "x," captured Dec. 7th. "c," "PUFFING BILLY."
"d," "PIPPLING JIMMY," or "THE BLAUWBANK BLACKGUARD."
"e," Howitzer, captured Dec. 11th. "f," "LONG TOM."
"g," "FAITH," "HOPE," and "CHARITY." "h," "SILENT SUSAN."

Carnegie, with one kilted company, moves off in the darkness towards the eastern end of the position ; and Lieutenant Hunt-Grubbe volunteers to go off ahead and scout a bit to see whether any of the Manchesters were yet holding any of the breastworks on the slope, and, if so, whether they needed reinforcements.

Arrived at one sangar, "Are you there, sergeant?" he calls out. "Yes, sir!" comes the answer ; and the young officer goes on for a yard or two, only to find himself seized by rough hands, pulled down, and threatened with death. Then the Boers waited, expecting the rest of the Gordons to walk straight into the trap also. They were soon undeceived. Carnegie was a sharp officer, quick in his methods ; and, seeing a slouch hat ahead of him, he halts his men and hastily gives the order to pour in a volley and then charge. The Gordons raise their rifles—the crack of the cordite wakes the echoes of the kopjes—and then, with bayonets levelled, dash forward with resistless force. A few Mausers flash, a few Gordons drop ; but in five short minutes the lieutenant is free again, and the hill-side runs with the blood of the farmers. Carnegie, who carried a rifle, was struck by four bullets, but not before he had with his own weapon shot four of the enemy.

One Boer who survived confessed afterwards that the sight of the Gordons, their set, white, thin faces, their eyes gleaming with light of battle, their tattered kilts, put fear into him and his comrades. They had come to handgrips with Britain's infantry ; now they were to learn the cost.

The day was now dawning, and the whole garrison was thoroughly roused. Four more companies of the Gordons, encamped on the far side of the town, marched out to the fray, headed by their colonel, Dick-Cunyngham. This heroic officer was just expressing his satisfaction at being out of hospital in time for the fray (he had been hard hit at Elandslaagte, as you remember), and was hurrying his men across the Klip River bridge, when a Boer on the other side of Cæsar's Camp fired a Mauser rifle. The bullet missed the target aimed at, skimmed the top of the ridge, flew nearly 3,000 yards, and smote the colonel of the Gordons that he died. Poor Dick-Cunyngham! After all your years of soldiering, after braving death a score of times, to be struck down by a stray bullet. The Gordons set their teeth, as is the habit of your Scotsman, and marched on. The Dutchmen would have a reckoning to pay for this.

Scott, the major of the battalion, took command, and led his men with haste to Cæsar's Camp. Half a battalion of the Rifle Brigade were also thrown into the position, and never were reinforcements more urgently needed. For the battle was raging fiercely. Mauser and Lee-Enfield were blazing fiercely at each other at nearly point-blank range. The Boers had pressed on to the very edge of the plateau. They held the south and east slopes of the position ; and, advancing from cover to cover, protected by the fire of the big guns on Bulwhana and the rifle-fire of their strong supports, they pressed on. When day broke, there had pressed forward to the attack not only the original storming party, but also a second commando of more than 1,000 men ; and these, lying on the south and east slopes, poured in a ceaseless fire at the defenders on the edge of the plateau.

On Wagon Hill the situation, though grave enough, was never quite so serious as on Cæsar's Camp. The storming party here had not quite such rough ground to

traverse as their comrades, and consequently they reached their objective somewhat earlier. A picket on the southern slope of the hill was in the act of being relieved, and a sergeant was going his rounds when he saw dusky forms just below him. "Who goes there?" Promptly the answer came, "The Town Guard! And who are you? Hands up or we fire!" This was the old ruse, but the sergeant had been too long at the game to be taken in so easily as this. "Ready! Present! Fire!" And two volleys flared out—one the crack of British cordite; the other the "ppht" of the Boer melinite. The two discharges were simultaneous, and men on both sides dropped.

The whole storming party did not ascend in a body. The Boers straggled up the whole face of the hill in small parties. They eluded some of the pickets on the hillside. They rushed others, answering, when challenged, that they were of the Town Guard or the Border Mounted Rifles; and so they contrived, at little loss to themselves, to reach the edge of the crest, having shot most of the sentries and small parties who kept watch and ward on the southern slope of the position. Straight for the crest they rushed, hoping to surprise; but by this time the Imperial Light Horse were very much awake, and their little Martini carbines, deadly weapons at short range, poured into the advancing groups well-aimed and deadly volleys.

The stormers halted, hesitated, and then, not daring to rush the last few yards, sank out of sight behind the boulders and hillocks that covered the slope. A number of them gained the nek between Wagon Hill West and Wagon Hill, and the fire of these men was deadly and destructive. Opposed to them on this side there was but a handful of sappers and infantry. On the western or outer slope the attack was even more successful. Stealing up on this side with noiseless tread, fully 100 men rushed swiftly and silently into the partially-constructed gun emplacement, near which the naval monster lay. The few sappers and sailors and infantry, who were some resting, some working there with every sense of security, had not time to stand to their arms nor to load their weapons ere a terrific volley was poured into them at ten paces' distance. Some of the engineers dropped dead on the instant, and more than one stalwart Highlander fell wounded on the rocks. Those who could run ran for their lives out of the emplacement, pursued by another volley. The darkness of the night had made the surprise possible, but the same darkness made it impossible for the Boers to aim with certainty, or not a man of ours could have lived.

Then Digby Jones, the young subaltern of sappers, showed the stuff of which he was made. He arrested the panic. "Steady!" he shouted; and the tones of his voice recalled the party to its sober senses. Any troops may be surprised. Any troops may be seized with momentary panic. The test of courage is not immunity from these—it is this: how soon do the men rally? The working party did not run far—only, in fact, a few yards; and then they made up their minds to face the foe and drive him back. Some Boers had gathered round the naval gun; and these were quickly dispersed and driven away by volleys fired from cover.

Then came the question of taking back the gun emplacement, of driving the enemy from the strong position they had won. The dauntless fellows ensconced themselves behind boulders at short range, and, whenever a flash from an enemy's rifle could be

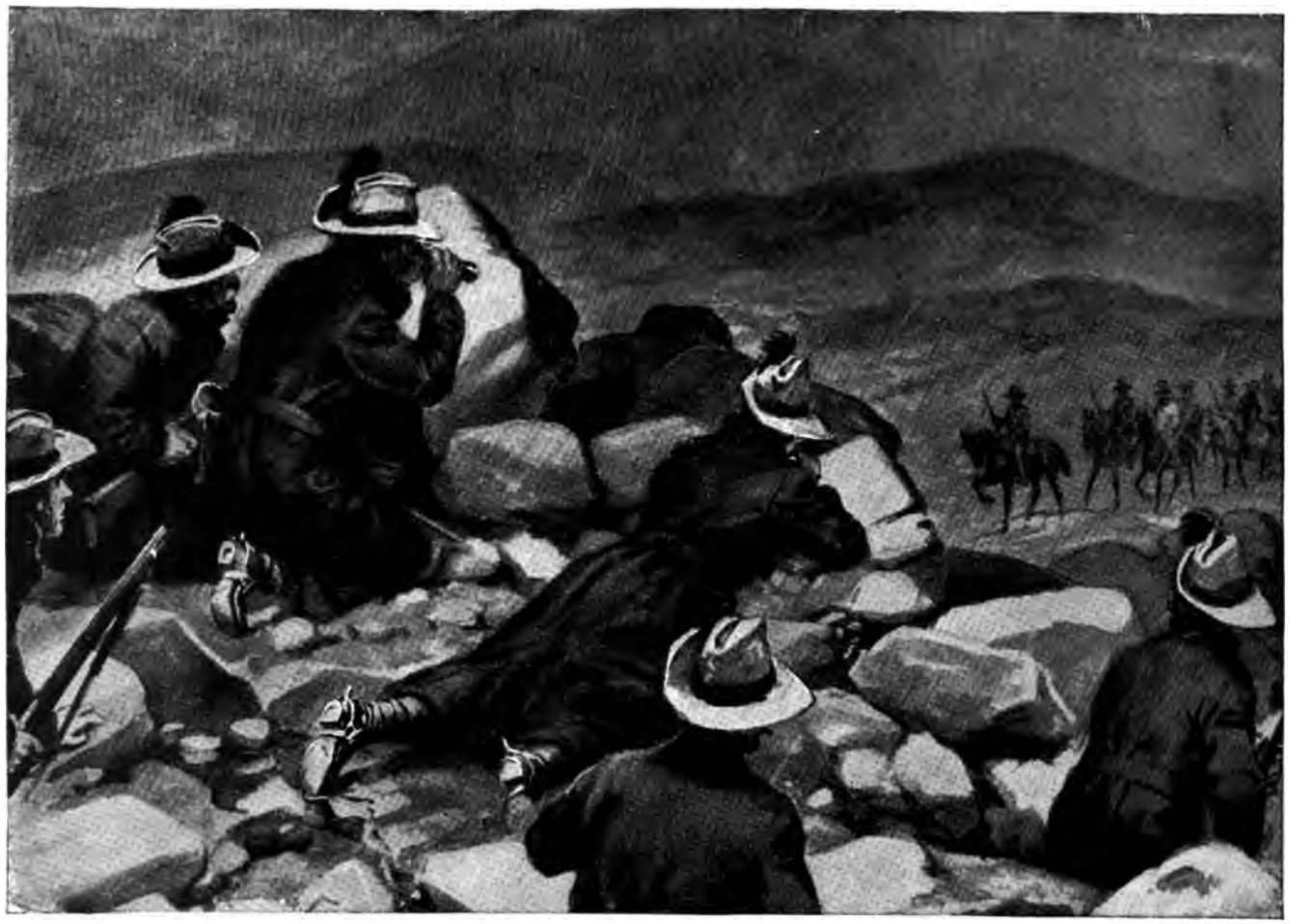
seen, fired at the place whence it proceeded. One or two Boers were silenced in this way. But it would never do to rely on this kind of fighting. It was necessary to clear the emplacement by other means, for there were sandbags there, the best of cover; and so long as the place was held by the Boers the naval gun was useless.

Then Digby Jones jumped to the front. He was a sapper, mind you, and it was none of his affair to lead charges. But he did. He gathered a handful of the Gordons and the sappers of the working party, and placed himself at their head. "We must have them out of that," said he. And the few naval gunners joined the ranks and turned up their sleeves. Quickly the little party of British advances, jumping from behind boulders, firing, rushing to the cover of the boulders in front. "Charge!" shouted the young lieutenant of Engineers, "Charge!" And, leaping from cover, sappers, Highlanders, and sailors bounded into the entrenchment. Rifles were discharged almost in their faces; they clubbed their weapons and laid on. The youthful leader smote and slew and cheered on his men as Bertrand du Guesclin must have smitten and slain and cheered on the men-at-arms in the far-off days of chivalry. The Dutchmen cannot stand the onset; and, when about a fifth of their number have been put out of action, they, in their turn, fly from the spot. On the other hand, neither are they really routed. They do not run far, but, establishing themselves behind boulders a short distance away, pour lead over and into and around the coveted stronghold.

Reinforcements were sent for, and not before they were urgently needed. It was now getting light, and as the sun rose the enemy began to hurl 94- and 40-pound shells on the top of the positions held by our men, and Cæsar's Camp received the attentions of a giant Creusot gun from Bulwhana. Wagon Hill was shelled by a 40-pounder Krupp. Our batteries of field artillery began to come up and soon joined in the fray. There was already one battery (the 42nd) behind Cæsar's Camp, under Major Goulburn; and Abdy, with the 53rd Battery, dashed up before the battle was many hours old, took up a position on the town slope of the ridge, and began to shell the eastern slope. Meanwhile the 21st Field Battery had come into action at Wagon Hill, and was hurling hundredweight after hundredweight of shrapnel amongst the Boers, who were advancing from Middle Hill and the west to support the assault.

The Riflemen and half a dozen Light Horse who had been driven out of their own sangars were labouring valiantly on Wagon Hill against fearful odds. Colonel Hamilton had sent down for reinforcements, and just at the right moment Major Miller-Wallnutt appeared on the scene with the rest of the kilties; and two companies of the King's Royal Rifles swung up the slope and dashed into the fray on the western side. Other troops were being hurried to the combat, but all the garrison could not be sent because the Boers were threatening on the north and east, and were pouring a heavy shell-fire upon Helpmakaar Hill.

Let us now try to form some accurate idea of how the fight stood at daybreak, what was the position, and how much the attackers had gained by their rush in the darkness. The line of defence that the Boers had attempted to rush consisted of three plateaus, running south-east to north-west in a kind of ridge. These plateaus were connected by "neks," places where the ground dipped a little. At the south-east



' WHO GOES THERE?'

stood the highest plateau—Cæsar's Camp; then a dip in the ridge; then another rise to Wagon Hill proper; then another nek, and then the smallest plateau, also called Wagon Hill—sometimes Wagon Hill West (by this name it will in future be called for the sake of distinction), the most northerly and westerly of the three. Cæsar's Camp open to attack from east and south; Wagon Hill from west and south.

Day broke to find the forces, after two hours or more of hard and bloody fighting, in this case:—At Cæsar's Camp the Boers had rushed the first line of sangars, held by the Manchesters. They had killed or wounded almost all the men they found there, and now themselves found cover in the same breastworks, which were not on the top of the plateau, but a little way down the slope. Inside this line of sangars was another, on the very edge of the plateau; and these inner sangars the Manchesters had defended throughout the night with success. Before dawn they had been joined by four companies of Gordons under Major Scott, and a squadron of Natal Mounted Rifles. Later, half a battalion of the Rifle Brigade, "the lads from London Town," came to aid in this defence.

This position was menaced from two sides, the south and east. From the south the Boers had advanced up and from the ravine of which mention has been made, and from the east they came up from the Klip River, across a scrub-covered plain, up a rough, bushy slope. The banks of the river, as are the banks of most South African rivers, were steep and high, and formed a sort of container for the Boer reserves, who could advance from thence into the firing line. The scrub also concealed the approaching marksmen from our riflemen.

On this side there could not be much fewer, on the slope, in the river-bed, and on the plain, than 4,500 men; and it was quite on the cards that whilst the storming party on the hillside occupied the attention of the garrison of Cæsar's Camp, another body would advance along the foot of the hill, working round the position, and getting between the Camp and Ladysmith itself. To check this move there had been stationed on the plain some of the Border Mounted Rifles, and Natal Police, and the Natal Carbineers were hurried up to strengthen them.

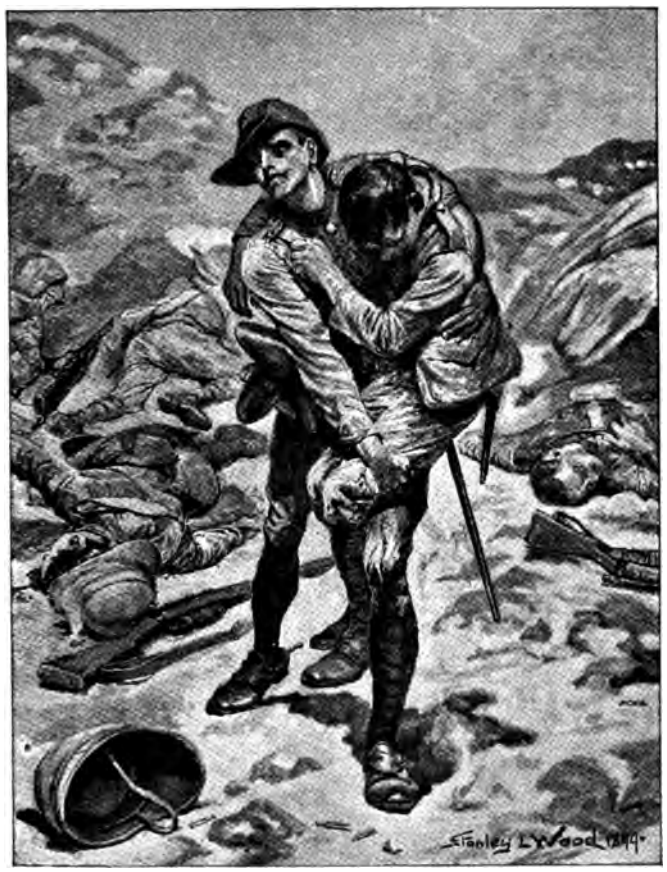
Wagon Hill proper was in the hands of a half battalion of the 60th King's Royal Rifles, with a small party of Naval Volunteers and a Hotchkiss gun; but when, in the confusion of the night, Villiers's storming party rushed the outlying pickets (on the slope, not on the summit), these Volunteers fled, after firing a round or two, and their gun was only saved by the presence of mind of an officer who dashed in and hauled it away.

In the nek between Wagon Hill and Wagon Hill West was Digby Jones and his working party. The storming party here numbered no more than 500. In the ground below the hill to the south were another 400; but few of these ever crossed the space between the Boer lines and our own. But on the west front of Wagon Hill West they swarmed in great numbers. The great danger to this position, however, lay in the fact that the Boers had gained a foothold in the intervening nek between Wagon Hill and Wagon Hill West, thus isolating the Light Horse.

Some Gordons, under Miller-Wallnutt, and two companies of the 60th had arrived on Wagon Hill West before daybreak Two more squadrons of Imperial Light Horse also arrived at Wagon Hill, spurring

their enfeebled horses. The other half battalion of the 60th also hastened up to the main hill.

So fierce, so sudden had been the attack on Wagon Hill, so unceasingly were boulders on the north slope (inside, nearest to Ladysmith), kept up a constant and determined fire. To this handful of men Ladysmith—ay, and the Empire—owed much. They were at the last gasp when



A HERO OF THE IMPERIAL LIGHT HORSE.

more Boers hastened up into the firing line, so great had been the loss of the Light Horse at the first onset, that the Boers had actually gained the top of this knoll as well as the nek, and would have rushed the town had not the remainder of the original garrison (two squadrons) of Light Horse, lying down amongst the Colonel Edwards, their chief, dashed up with the other two squadrons.

Digby Jones, with his little working party, was holding in check the party who had effected a lodgment on the nek.

Let us now follow the fortunes of the day at each position. For this was not a battle in which there was any particular

plan. There was no strategy, no manœuvring. It was not like one of those battles where the generals on each side move battalions here and batteries there as skilled players move the pieces on a chess-board. It was a stern, hard combat; a soldier's battle; a duello of rifle against rifle; a tussle of endurance and stamina. Officers were of no account, except as company leaders—except, that is, in the sense that officers used to be of account in those days when battles were to those who hit hardest and lasted longest. The only tactics were to take all the cover you could get, and fire at every enemy you could get a sight of.

And first, Cæsar's Camp. Here the Manchesters' pickets had been slain in the darkness; and the sangars on the slopes were in the hands of the enemy. Here for two hours the Manchester Regiment, confident in its discipline, held the foe at bay single-handed. When the Natal Mounted Volunteers and the Gordon Highlanders arrived they went straight into the firing line—a line, alas! even then too thin; and the four companies of the Rifle Brigade arrived to find their help sorely needed

There were some sangars only a very short distance in front of our firing line, on the very brow of the hill, from which the enemy could command part of the plateau; and these it was imperative to clear out. All except one of them; and that was still held by a sergeant of Manchesters and fifteen men—another story that shall be told later. Captain Carnegie, of the Gordon Highlanders, offered to clear the enemy out with his company of Highlanders; and in the half light (it was about 4.30 a.m.) he crawled out. Officers were scarce—in fact, Carnegie was the only commissioned officer in the company at the time; but he gave command of half to the colour-sergeant, spread his men well out, and advanced. The Boers shouted in English, trying to trick the Scotsman; but he was too old a bird to be caught by that chaff. He saw a slouch felt hat, and he promptly ordered a volley. He himself used his carbine like a sharpshooter. "Charge!" And the Gordons flew at the breastworks. But the Boers again did not wait. They fled down the hill and hid behind boulders; but not before they had emptied their magazines into the Highlanders' ranks.

This was the first success of the day to the British. The Gordons occupied the first line of sangars and fired from cover at the Boers below. Encouraged by the shouts of victory, the Manchesters set to work. The Boers still occupied one outer fortification on the crest on the plateau, and made the air scream with their bullets. But soon a louder, wilder shriek silences the shrill vociferations of the Mausers. It is Goulburn's Battery coming into action. With unparalleled rapidity the six guns hurl shrapnel at the sangars. The Boers have not shown themselves, for the leaden hail burst just over the top of the breastworks.

Now, Manchesters! Now is your chance! "Fix bayonets!" "Charge!" And like tiger cats the lithe lads of Lancashire leap at the foe. The Boers fire one scattering volley; but they do not bide the push of the steel, and they, too, turn and run down the slope to the shelter of those boulders whence their comrades are spitting death venomously. A withering fire pursues them. Then one topples over on his face. And another, and another. One runs at full speed. A bullet splits his spine. His shriek pierces the awful din of battle, and he rolls over

and over, like a shot rabbit, down the steep slope, until, thud! he strikes a huge stone and lies still.

The top of Cæsar's Camp is clear again. There are thousands of Dutchmen on the slopes of it; but they have been swept from the plateau and the crest with the heaviest loss of the day. And our troops feel sure of victory now, for the Boer has again refused to face the bayonet. But the battle is not over. They have been fighting for four hours already, and it is six o'clock; little do they know that ere the battle shall be ended the sun, now rising in its glory, shall be setting.

Now the force on Cæsar's Camp turns its attention to the nek between itself and Wagon Hill, and tries to send a detachment to the help of the Light Horse; but the big gun from Bulwhana sweeps the slope, and the Boers who have gained a foothold on Wagon Hill are able to sweep the place with fire, so that nothing can live. So the Gordons and the Rifles and the Manchesters turn their attention to their own position, where, after all, there is quite enough to do. The Boer reserves at the foot of the eastern slope are trying to work round the base of the hill, pushing on through the scrub. If they do it they can attack our position from the northern (*i.e.* the rear) slope and cut us off from the town. But they have to reckon with some irregulars as bold as themselves, for the Natal Police, the Border Mounted Rifles, and the Natal Carbineers push forward through the scrub to meet them and drive them back with loss. Still they have large reserves to draw upon, and more men crowd into the plain and swarm across the slope.

Then occurs one of the most magnificent pieces of fighting seen through that Homeric combat. The 53rd (Abdy's) Field Battery limbers up its guns to a point in the scrub that lines the Klip River, and behind the north-east shoulder of Cæsar's Camp. This brings it to within 2,200 yards of the Boer reserves. Quickly the guns are trained loaded and fired, and a perfect hail of shrapnel admonishes the Boers. The guns fire now on the eastern slope, now on the southern, and this means that the shells must skim the crest of the hill, just clearing the heads of our own infantry. It is a daring piece of work, a piece of work that might not be attempted except by a highly disciplined force, confident in the perfection of its workmanship. A fractional error in the training of a piece, an infinitesimal mistake in the timing of a fuse, would mean that the shells would kill our own infantry.

And that same infantry needs plenty of nerve to stand it. Time after time shells buzz over them, and burst not more than thirty yards in front. But there is no mishap, thanks to that good fortune which ever follows the efforts of the able man. Truly the gunnery was magnificent — the best seen so far in the war, and that was saying a great deal.

Hardly had Abdy's men opened fire when they were perceived by the Boer gunners on Bulwhana's summit and Lombard's Kop, and immediately a terrible fire opened upon our battery. From Bulwhana the big Creusot gun, "Puffing Billy," cast its huge missiles, its 94-pound shells, while from the lower eminence a battery of 15-pounders opened. Abdy's guns were 15-pounders too; but alas! they were by no means of the range of the Boer field guns. It seems absurd—does it not?—that a poor little country like the Transvaal, whose total public revenues for a year were not more than the income of many an English borough, should have

better field artillery than the richest nation in the world—the nation, too, possessing within its borders more skilled artizans than the whole white population of both Republics. Yet so it was. The 53rd Battery blessed, that day, the War Office that had armed them with popguns; but this did not prevent them from persevering in their duty.

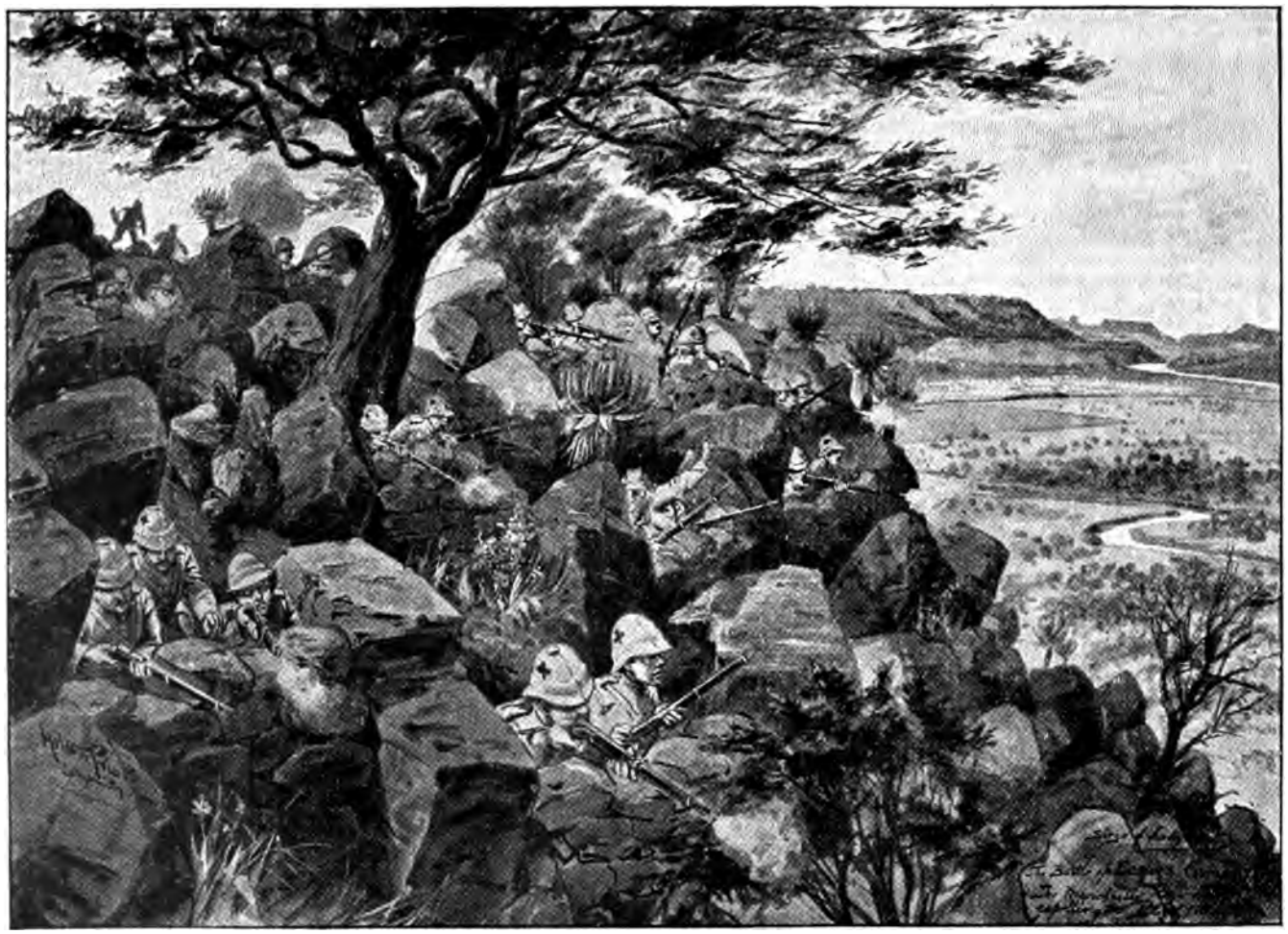
Being absolutely unable to reply to any of the Boer guns, Abdy did not try to. He could at all events reach the Boer riflemen on the hill-sides, and these he continued to ply with shrapnel. It was a magnificent exhibition of coolest bravery and the most resolute endurance. A shell from the Bulwhana gun would drop right into the middle of the battery, followed at a few seconds' interval by three or four smaller projectiles from Lombard's Kop. But the British gunners never budged an inch. If to "stick to your guns" had not already been a proverb, it would have become one from that day forth. While the great missile was bursting, while the showers of metal were flying, striking down man and horse, impinging against gun and limber, the guns would be loaded and fired as though nothing had happened.

Upon one occasion it seemed as though some disaster must happen. A 94-pound shell plumped into the battery, landing within a few feet of a gun. Now the Boer shells did not always burst; but this one did. And when it burst it sent up a cloud of dust and iron and steel, hiding the British gun from sight. Almost on the instant there issued from the cloud a flash, a shell flew over the crest, burst with beautiful precision in front of a knot of about twenty Boers, and killed or wounded all of them except two. No words can do justice to the extraordinary bravery of the men who worked that gun. They had loaded and trained it before the shell dropped, and they did not waste a moment in firing. It was magnificent, but horrible—like Death issuing out of Hell.

One Bozeley, the sergeant of a gun in No. 2 Section, was sitting on the trail of his piece when two fragments of shell hit him. One took off an arm, the other a leg; and his mangled body fell across the gun-trail. His comrades thought him dead, and ran to the bleeding carcase. But he was very much alive, and in the midst of his agony thought only of duty. "Roll me off, boys," he said, "and go on firing!" He was picked up and carried to the rear; and as the ambulance men bore him from the field he turned round, waved his remaining hand and shouted, "Buck up, No. 2 Section!" How could any foe ever hope to conquer men like these? They might be beaten once, twice, thrice; but they must win in the end.

Utterly regardless, then, of the shells of the enemy, the 53rd Battery continued to play on the two slopes of the hill; and the Boers dropped before the shrapnel's hail, nor could reserves be got up into their firing line. The execution wrought by these half-dozen British guns was terrible; and the area over which the shells of the battery burst was strewn with men maimed and mangled, dead and wounded. Here a head was smashed to fragments, there a limb blown off. It was a sight never to be forgotten, nor would those who heard the shrieks and groans of the smitten burghers ever forget the horror of it. What was more to the purpose, the shrapnel searched the slopes so thoroughly as to prevent any reinforcement of the firing line, thus materially assisting in the defence of the position.

For two hours the battery bore unflinch-



"RIFLE ANSWERED RIFLE FROM TOP TO BOTTOM OF CÆSAR'S CAMP" (*p.* 391)

ingly the punishment inflicted by the Boer artillery; and then the Dutch gunners, seeing that they failed to silence the British guns, left them alone, and devoted the rest of the day to pitching their projectiles on to the top of the ridge. Wherefore you had the strange spectacle of artillery on both sides, neither firing at the other, but each engaged in shelling the other side's infantry. From the Boer point of view this was a mistake. Their shells did little damage to our infantry. Ours did much to theirs. It would, therefore, have been good tactics on their part to silence our guns; and they might have accomplished this object by a dozen well or luckily aimed shells.

While the 53rd Battery was thus meting out death and destruction, a few of the Natal Mounted Volunteers and Border Mounted Rifles, with one company of the Gordons, pushed forward a little down the southern slope. Over their heads buzzed the shells of our guns, bursting sometimes not more than twenty yards in front of them, then spreading and scattering ahead, clearing a way for the infantry. The Natal Mounted Volunteers pushed ahead, supported by the other troops in their thin, widespread line, all advancing slowly and cannily from cover to cover, never showing more than could be helped, and drawing trigger whenever a felt hat or shaggy head showed itself. This movement began at about 10.30 a.m., and for an hour and a half went steadily on. Then the Rifles and the other Gordon companies on this hill moved over the crest of the plateau and steadily pushed the Boers back over the crest of the ridge to the south and east.

Then our men took up position on the top of the slopes, hid behind boulders and sangars, and from noon until half-past four in the afternoon held the Boers at bay. During that time (four hours and a half) there was a continual spit and crackle of rifles. The British held to their post; the Boers who had originally gained the crest of the ridge obstinately clung to the side of the slope. It was a deadly duel—man against man, rifle against rifle. But every now and then a crashing sound would be heard, a shell would whine over the crest, and for a moment or two the spit of the Mausers would be less vicious.

At the other end of Cæsar's Camp the Manchesters held their own well. There was one little party in a somewhat isolated sangar. It had been cut off in the rush in the early morning; but the men who held it—fifteen privates and a sergeant—had managed to keep their heads during the excitement, and so to save their little stronghold from capture. While it was dark the sixteen fired at the flashes of the Boer rifles, and in the direction of Boer voices; and when it became light they played their own game like men. Three or four times the Boers tried to rush them. The first time the sixteen stood up, and, as the Boers rose to their feet a few yards from the sangar to start the rush, the Lee-Metfords poured in withering volleys. Only eleven effective rifles remained in the sangar, but of the stormers hardly one lived. After three more attempts—the garrison was thinned every time—the Dutchmen desisted, and contented themselves with sniping. Terrible was the execution wrought by the little band of heroes, magnificent their resistance. And when at last the day was over, one sound man stepped out of the sangar. By his side, supported by him, was another man, wounded in two places. And in the little fortification were fourteen bodies. The two heroes who survived were named Pitt

and Scott. All honour to them and their comrades who did not live to share their triumph.

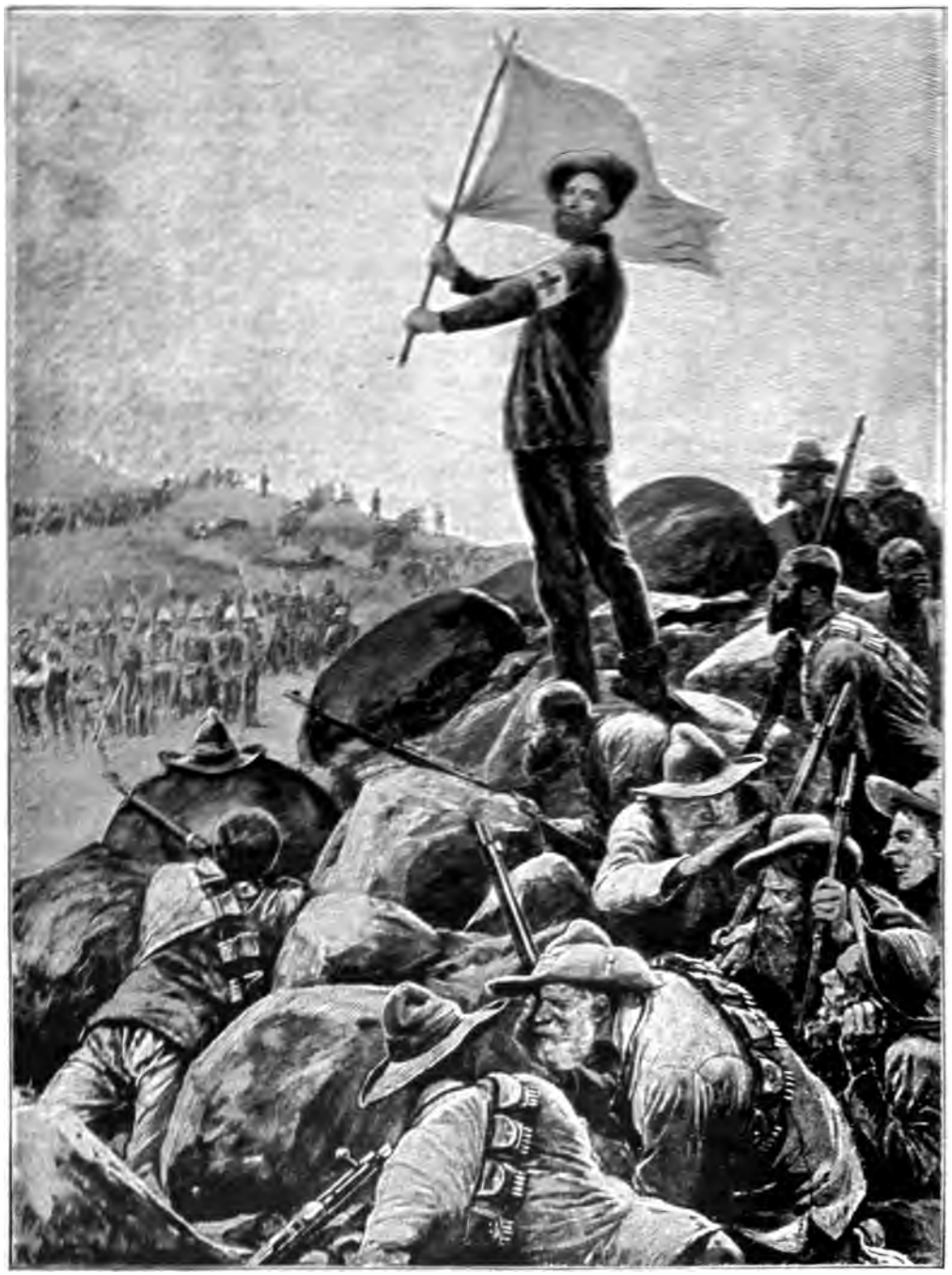
Such were the heroes whom Lancashire sent forth to fight the battles of the Empire. Hour after hour the battle raged. Shells from Bulwhana and Lombard's Kop dropped on the ridge, sometimes demolishing the flimsy sangars behind which our men had shelter, and everywhere raising clouds of dust. Pieces of iron and steel, and fragments of rock flew about, and here and there a man was wounded, but the real danger did not lie here ; it lay in the Boer riflemen on the hillside, who, ensconced behind the boulders, kept up such a fusillade as no one ever heard of before. And as the cover of our men was, in many cases, of the flimsiest and slightest, many a good man dropped with a bullet in arm or chest or shoulder.

After the men who had first gained a footing on the ridge by their charge in the dark had been pushed back by the dauntless Gordons and Riflemen and Volunteers and Manchesters, the fighting went on for hours without any further attempt to storm the position. It was simply a rifle duel at short range, a duel in which our men were assisted by the masterly gunnery of the 53rd Field Battery. Lucky was it for England that her soldiers were no whit less obstinate, no whit less tenacious, than the assailants. Noon. The duel still raging. One o'clock, two o'clock, four o'clock—still it continued unabated. It had been going on, this incessant musketry, for fourteen hours, from darkness to dawn, from dawn to noontide, from noon until the early twilight came.

At half-past four an incident occurred that must be recorded. A man rose from the hillside, bearing in his hand a white flag, and came boldly up, shouting, "I am coming in to surrender." His comrades also rose to their feet. A few of ours stood up to receive him, when suddenly the men behind raised their guns to their shoulders, and, crack! a heavy hail of bullets whistled past our men's ears. But there were in the sangar soldiers who had not stood up, but who had their rifles loaded at the ready ; and when these perceived how treacherous a device was this white flag, they poured in a murderous volley and brought down nearly every traitor of them all. It is grievous to have to record an incident of this kind concerning men who fought as the Boers fought that day. One does not like to think of men of valour being guilty of conduct meet only for barbarians.

So rifle answered rifle from top to bottom of Cæsar's Camp that livelong day ; and happy was the man who had plenty of cover and no lack of ammunition. The greatest slaughter was wrought by "A" Company of the Gordons, who happened to take up a position where they could fire freely without exposing themselves. Opposite to them forty-six bodies were found the next day, and as it is fair to assume that at least four were wounded for every one man killed, an idea can be formed of the marksmanship of that company of the 92nd, and of the slaughter inflicted by them.

Clouds had been gathering that afternoon—a merciful thing to the men who had to lie all day, half clad, and exposed to the full glare of the sun. Suddenly, at about 4.45 p.m., when the fight had lasted nearly fifteen hours, these clouds broke. Then the rains descended and the floods came. Thunder crashed, and lightning danced luridly in the sky. It might have been the Almighty rebuking the mortals who dared to deface His image and likeness.



A WHITE FLAG INCIDENT.

But the men who attacked and the men who defended Cæsar's Camp thought not of these things. Instead, the Boers gathered themselves for one last despairing effort to overwhelm and destroy the haggard, half-starved, half-naked men who had so long defied them.

Let us now return to Wagon Hill and observe the fortunes of the day there. On the hill itself there was no man to be seen—that is, on the plateau at the top. The Imperials had been decimated, and more than decimated, at the first onset, and the remaining few of them had been rushed off the plateau. When Edwards, their colonel (he was an old Regular cavalry officer) arrived with the other two squadrons, he found a mere handful of his men and a few of the K.R.R. lying among the rocks holding the enemy at bay. And what an enemy! The storming party here was evidently composed of crack shots, picked marksmen, who certainly showed the best shooting of the whole campaign. Some of them were armed with Mausers, others with sporting rifles. The reason for carrying this weapon was, no doubt, that the bearer of it was usually a skilled hunter and practised shot, accustomed to shooting buck; and every sportsman knows that he can shoot best with a gun to which he is well used. These sporting rifles do not carry to anything like the distance of military rifles, but they are usually much lighter, and have two barrels. In an affair of this kind, where the storming party did not intend or expect to do much long-range shooting, a weapon sighted to 1,000 yards was as good as one sighted to 2,800.

No complaint could have been made on account of the weapons used had it not been that many of the stormers carried and used sporting bullets—explosive bullets, which penetrate and then explode inside the body of the man or beast hit. This was another blot upon the fair fame of Kruger's commandoes.

To return. The shooting of these men was wonderful, and they had opposed to them men who were no contemptible adversaries at their own game. After being pushed off the crest in the first wild rush, the Light Horse soon rallied, and, lying down amongst the stones, gave the Boers as good as they sent. The Imperials carried Martini carbines, short rifles of no great range but useful enough at this distance. For there was between them and Villiers's men a space of never more than 300 yards—anything from that down to thirty, and one man even fired all day from behind a boulder at ten yards from the trenches.

The Light Horse were not in line, or any other sort of formation. Every man crawled up as close as he could to the enemy, selected his cover, and pounded away. You looked round or over your stone. There is a slouch hat! Crack! Hit him—hooray! Let's look out again. Oh! What is that? No idea my left arm was showing—that bullet went clean through. Edwards is down: the hero of Gun Hill. He is only wounded, but there are three other officers who will never lead us again, and three more whose soldiering is stopped indefinitely.

Young Lord Ava, eldest son and heir of that Marquis of Dufferin, who has served the Queen in three continents and added a province to the Empire, is shot here. He was bringing a message from Ian Hamilton. This is no place to bring messages to. The bullet went in at the temple and out at the back of his head. Carry him down, somebody. He is not dead yet; and we would not willingly lose him, for a better

officer, a braver gentleman, a more joyous comrade never wore a sword.

It is hot work here. Villiers himself is somewhere with this contingent. Anyhow the Boers fight like fiends of the pit and shoot like William Tell. But we must hang on, Imperials. The Boers called us cowards once—said we would not face their rifles. We will show them something. Moreover, on us depends the safety of the whole host. If we give back, if we let these fellows gain undisturbed possession of Wagon Hill, Cæsar's Camp is not worth five minutes' purchase ; for from Wagon Hill it could be enfiladed by rifle fire. So keep them going, boys.

The boys do keep them going. The few officers remaining, commissioned and non-commissioned, shout rough words of encouragement to the men, exhort them to be steady, to take careful aim, to take plenty of cover, and, above all, to keep cool. And all the fighting blood of the race surges through the veins of the Light Horsemen, and they vow never to yield a foot to all the Boers in Africa. Nor do they.

From Fouries Spruit the Boers pour unceasingly man after man into their firing line. Still the Imperials do not budge. Where one Boer was at daybreak there are five at noon. Still the Light Horse lose not courage. There are bodies of men in tattered shirt-sleeves on the rocks in front, the bodies of the troopers shot down in the darkness. One has fallen between two rocks ; he is not dead, for he moves now and then. No ! He is only wounded in two places. See, now ! From over his body a rifle-barrel protrudes. A Boer is making use of the wounded man as cover. He fires from close range, knowing that our men will not fire back at him for fear of hitting their wounded comrade. In Boer circles this is known as "slimness."

The miscreant—for no other word can describe him—hits four Imperials, killing two, before the troopers can make up their minds to retaliate. At last, however, dire necessity, the safety of the army and the camp, compels them to silence this enemy. Two bullets fly at him, but he is down behind his cover. More and more and more, and at last one pierces his brain. There is one villain the less cumbering God's earth. But when the "cover" is picked up, alas ! he has eight bullet wounds. Still, he does not die—such constitutions have some men !

The Boer reinforcements are pressing on and on, their fire grows thicker. If we could clear them off the top and drive them to the southern slope, we should be in a better position. As it is, we are on the northern slope, and they are on the ridge. Volunteers for a charge ! Mackworth, a major of the Light Horse—he is a regular officer of the 60th Rifles—jumps to his feet, and, followed by a handful of men, starts across the fifty yards of open ground that must be cleared. A hurricane greets him. His followers drop to a man, and he himself is hit by an explosive bullet. Undaunted, another officer, Lieutenant Tod of the 60th, calls upon a dozen of his men to follow him. They crawl to the farthest cover, and then essay to rush that fatal fifty yards. At half the distance the gallant leader drops dead, and seven of his heroic following are killed and wounded. The other five bolt back to cover.

Keep going, men of the Imperial Light Horse. Hark ! A bugle blows at the foot of the slope. Thank God ! It is the Devons, three companies of them, swinging up the hill with Park, their colonel, at the head. For nine hours the grim irregulars

have maintained this unequal battle, and they feel, when the West-countrymen, spreading out wide, join the firing line, that the day is saved. This was at 11 a.m.

From that time onward the firing continues hotly. The range is so short that the execution is positively murderous, and the musketry so continuous that men have to cease firing to allow their rifles and carbines to grow cool. Every man who shows a head or an arm from behind his boulder finds himself the target of a score of marksmen. And so the firing goes on, and the sun gets hotter and hotter, and when the attack has lasted for ten hours both sides tire. So they lie down behind the rocks for an hour or so without exchanging a shot. The Light Horsemen, many of whom have been on picket duty since before midnight and have been fighting from two a.m. until noon, would like to sleep, and do, in fact, find themselves nodding. But this will not do. They must not, dare not, slumber.

The duel recommences at about one p.m., the most awful duel, perhaps, ever engaged in by armies. Once or twice some of the most daring Dutchmen essay a rush. But to make it they have to rise from cover, and not a man advances more than two yards after he has stood upright. Our men, on the other hand, are equally impotent ; they cannot cross the lead-swept zone. For four hours more they go at it, hammer and tongs, carbine and express rifle, Lee-Metford and Mauser ; and he would be a bold man who should decide which side had the best of the argument. And so they fought until the storm broke.

All this time a combat fierce and fell was being waged on Wagon Hill West. This was where that young hero, the lieutenant of sappers, with sixty mixed men, had been surprised by Villiers and a large party of barefooted stormers. It has been told how the working party was driven out of the gun emplacement in the darkness; and how our men recovered themselves and retook the position almost immediately; and how early in the morning Miller-Wallnutt came up with some Gordons; and how two companies of the King's Royal Rifles made a not unwelcome appearance. The Boers attempted to reinforce this position from the plain in the west, as well as from the south, but the reserves on the plain were so severely handled by the 21st Battery that they refused to face the shrapnel, and retired to cover.

The first five hours—until about seven a.m.—were spent in a combat like that waged on the main position : a rifle duel from cover at short range. But then the irresistible inclination of the British infantryman to get to close quarters asserted itself ; and with fixed bayonets the sappers and Gordons and 60th and half-dozen sailors (these with clubbed rifles) made a fierce, determined rush at the enemy on the plateau and crest line of the hill. A fusillade greeted them, enough to daunt the bravest, but it did not stop these men. The Boers (one of them afterwards confessed it in a letter to his friends) were terror-stricken at the sight presented by our line. It was, he said, like an encounter with spectres. For the men were haggard and wan ; faces pale with the semi-starvation ; many of them more fit for a hospital than a battlefield. And as they threw themselves on the foe with the ferocity of tigers the Boers turned and fled over the crest.

So far, so good. Our men were now able to line the top of the steep hillside and fire down on the attacker. For the Boers had not fled far—only a few yards down

the slope. Until ten a.m. the firing went on without any intermission, and then the Dutchmen seemed to tire somewhat. The scanty garrison dared not go down the slope to charge them with the bayonet; because the descent was so steep, that any man who showed over the almost perpendicular crest of the hill was an easy mark for those below. For four hours more the bullets flew up hill and down, until two o'clock arrived.

Then it was our turn to be seized with panic. Suddenly there appeared, right at our men's feet, over the crest-line, a number of the well-known slouch hats. The Boers had crept up unperceived in the steepest part. It was like a man standing on the roof of a house. He could see people on the other side of the street below, but not those immediately under the wall of the house; and the effect was as if a score of men attacking the man on the roof suddenly popped their heads above the eaves, having placed ladders against the wall. It was Majuba in miniature. Our men bolted back to the other slope; and what might have happened no one can tell had there not been on the hill an officer of the calibre of Digby Jones, the sapper.

Seeing our men's backs, the Boers let fly a volley with deadly effect, and then rushed for the gun emplacement once more. But the lieutenant of Engineers and Miller-Wallnutt, of the 92nd, stood firm. They rallied their men with stern words and cool, and soon the rank and file recovered from the panic. Then Digby Jones and the major of the Gordons, with a handful of men, rushed once more to retake the gun emplacement. A gigantic figure of a man, with a bandolier over one shoulder and a big leather satchel slung over the other, his enormous beard covering his chest, rose from behind the sandbags, raised a sporting rifle to his shoulder, and with quick aim fired at the towering figure of the Gordon officer. At the same instant a sapper pulled the trigger of his rifle. Miller-Wallnutt fell, his head shattered to pieces by an explosive bullet. The bearded Boer fell also, a hole drilled through his head. It was Villiers himself. He had fired 110 rounds from the spot where they found him, and his satchel was full of explosive-bullet cartridges—800 rounds of them.

Digby Jones rushed on with his little handful. A Boer, evidently of some authority, covered him with his rifle; but the sapper was too quick for him. He fired his revolver once, twice, and the Boer leader fell. It was Commandant Van Wyk, Villiers's second in command. Twice more the young British leader's pistol spoke, and two more bearded men bit the dust. The emplacement was won again—twice taken and twice retaken. But in the moment of victory the sword fell. The youth who had so nobly done his duty, and for twelve long hours had kept the foe at bay, who had twice rallied his broken forces by his firm, courageous demeanour, fell, shot through the head. He was cut off in the spring of his life. But how many men are there who have seen all life's seasons, and are dying peacefully amid the frosts of old age, who have done and suffered, and dared and endured half as much as this noble boy of twenty-two?

It was said that Ian Hamilton had determined to recommend him for the Victoria Cross for that day's work—as well he might. So Lieutenant Digby Jones died in the service of his country, an honour to his nation and to the Army. May Britain never want such men to uphold the honour

of her name and to prove her bulwark in the hour of trial!

Not only the two officers already named, but six men were killed in recapturing the gun emplacement, and others were wounded. Still, they retook the position somehow—nobody ever knew how. There was, however, a very serious state of affairs on Wagon Hill West. The gun emplacement was, as has been said, not on the flat-topped hill, but in the nek or saddle adjoining; and the Boers, by their sudden rush, had driven our men off the plateau. A message to Hamilton! Tell him the Boers have rushed the plateau, and that we only hold the nek. Tell him that we cannot possibly push them off without reinforcements, for our losses have been heavy.

AMBULANCE STRUCK BY A SHELL.

Hamilton grasps the situation instantly. He telegraphs to headquarters, and Sir George White despatches a squadron of the 18th Hussars to the rescue. This is the use made of cavalry in Ladysmith—to keep them in hand as a mobile force to be thrown wherever they are most wanted. Arrived at the hill the squadron dismounts, the men picket their horses, load their carbines, and hurry up to the nek. The reinforcement is more than welcome. Now for a British rush. The Gordons—what is left of them—burn to try the steel again, for Miller-Walnutt was their pet giant, and their colonel is lying dead two miles away. From boulder to boulder they spring—Gordons, Rifles, and Hussars, not forgetting the hardy Engineers—up the little slope. A shout, a rush, a thrust—two or three Dutchmen fall, and the plateau is ours once more.

For two hours more there is the old relentless musketry duel. There is some doubt whether Digby Jones has been killed or only wounded; and a brother officer, Lieutenant Dennis of the Sappers, crawls out of cover to look. Bullets whistle round him, but he goes on; for he

is resolved that if there is still fire in that clay it shall not be suffered to die out. Slowly Dennis picks his way among the rocks. Is that he? No. Ah! there he is. The messenger of mercy drops on one knee to place his hand over the heart when a bullet shatters his brain, and he falls lifeless across the body of his dead friend.

Then the rain began to fall.

The decisive moment had arrived. The crisis had come. The day was closing in, and as the sun's rays waxed more dim, so the storm became more terrible. Our troops had been engaged, some of them for nearly fifteen hours, in a Titanic struggle such as had never been seen since that great Turk, Osman Ghazi, with his 40,000 bayonets, hurled Skobeloff's 120,000 Russians back from the walls of Plevna. And the present struggle differed from that in that this was a combat between armies of free men. Those of our troops who had been longest fighting had tasted no food for twenty-four hours—their last meal having been at 5 p.m. the previous day. No man had had a mouthful for twelve hours, and all were half starved to begin with.

Now, in addition to hunger and Boer bullets, they were exposed to the fury of an African thunder-storm. Their poor rags were wet through in a minute. They could hardly see for the water that poured off their helmets. How long, O Lord, how long? When, as on a signal, from the slopes of Wagon Hill and Cæsar's Camp, from donga and scrub, from boulder and rock, there arose 4,000 Boers, who all, with one accord, charged desperately up at the British positions. It was a bold conception, this assault under cover of the blinding storm, and it was nearly successful.

Not on Cæsar's Camp, for there the Manchesters and Gordons and Rifle Brigade, seeing the foe advance in masses to the charge, leaped to their feet, fixed bayonets, and tore over the crest to meet them. So swept out the thin red line at Waterloo, the men who had lain in the mud all day, pounded by cannon balls and charged by cavalry. The British infantryman can act on the defensive with a tenacity only rivalled by the Boer. But—keep the British infantryman lying down on his belly all day, and then let him loose at the foe—God help the men who have to stand that bayonet charge!

The tattered brown line swept down the slope. The farmers saw it coming. They halted; fired; then lay down again behind boulders and vomited lead upon it. But the line never halted, though men dropped by the way. The knives on rifle-barrels are bearing down upon them. Nearer and nearer. Fire seems to have no effect on those white-faced demons. The men in petticoats are on them—the same men who slew their brethren at the Valley of the Eland. God! Will nothing stop them? The chill fear enters into the hearts of the farmers. The bayonet line is only a hundred yards away—fifty—thirty. All is over! Run for your lives!

And at a pace that our infantry cannot hope to emulate, the Boers on the slope of Cæsar's Camp turn and flee. The British soldiers yell after them bitter taunts and curses on their cowardice. Ten minutes of the cold steel would have been some compensation for the horrors of this day. But it is of no use to try and catch them up. The only thing to do is to fire volleys into their flying masses.

See! They halt! What—are they going to face us again?

No! It is not that. Something terrible

has happened. The River Klip and Fouries Spruit, which have all day been almost dry, have suddenly become roaring, raging torrents. The storm which the Boers thought would be their help has proved their destruction. With a shout of vengeance, the khaki line forms up once more. We have them now. They are between the devil and the deep sea. God has not forgotten us, and He who divided the Red Sea in the days of old has now His hand upon the floodgates of Heaven.

But again the farmers see the bayonets coming. They are brave after their own fashion ; but they cannot and will not face that weapon. They choose to risk drowning rather than be slain by the steel ; and so they leap into the rushing water and strike out for the opposite bank. And some are carried away by the flood ; and some are shot by the remorseless foe behind them. And some reach the other side, only to be pelted by the British marksmen as they scramble up the bank. It is a holocaust.

On Wagon Hill West the Boers rushed back up the crest and over it, and once again the troops broke and retired in confusion. There was no heroic lieutenant of sappers to rally them this time, but other officers were there to stem the tide of disaster. Somebody shouted "Retire!" But Major Rice and a young subaltern of the Rifles stood firm and rallied the men. The Boers had gained the crest and were pouring in the hottest fusillade of the day; the rain was descending after a style of which home-staying Britons can have no conception. But, in face of it all, these two officers gathered their men into a loose line.

"Fix bayonets!" The Gordons, the Rifles, the Engineers, and the Hussars faced round for one last charge. The command seemed to galvanise them into life again. "Charge!" The officers led the way, waving their helmets. Bullets greeted them in clouds. "Forward! 92nd!" yelled a sergeant. And the Highlanders flew at the throats of the enemy. "At them, Rifle Brigade!" "The steel! The steel!" And heedless of the pelting tempest and the storm of lead the decimated companies hurled themselves forward. Highlanders jump out of the ranks, and drive their bayonets through the bodies of lagging Boers. The sights and the sounds are horrible.

As the bayonet line got closer and closer, so the Dutchmen's fire grew wilder and yet more wild ; and as with a cheer the British infantry came to the slaying, the farmers turned and fled downhill. Nor did they rally again at this point. The worn, exhausted British stood on the crest, or lay down and leaned over, every man firing into the flying mass as fast as he could load his rifle. Swiftly the defeated stormers fled from the spot, but not so swiftly as to escape heavy loss. The punishment must always be heavy when men are retreating under rifle-fire ; and here the Boers suffered terribly. Man after man fell on the steep hillside, until the whole slope was slippery with blood.

Wagon Hill West was saved.

Now the whole of the British positions were clear of the enemy except the main plateau and crest of Wagon Hill. But on Wagon Hill the assault was nearly successful, and would have succeeded but for the valour and conduct of the Devonshire battalion. Here, as has been said, the Boers had massed in force, sending up reinforcements the whole day. The Light Horse and the 60th had failed to dislodge them, and had only just managed to hold them at bay. Even when the Devons came up, the firing line

was only just strong enough to keep the foe in check. When the storm burst, even more Boers pressed to the summit, and it seemed as though they would, after all, hold the ground they had won.

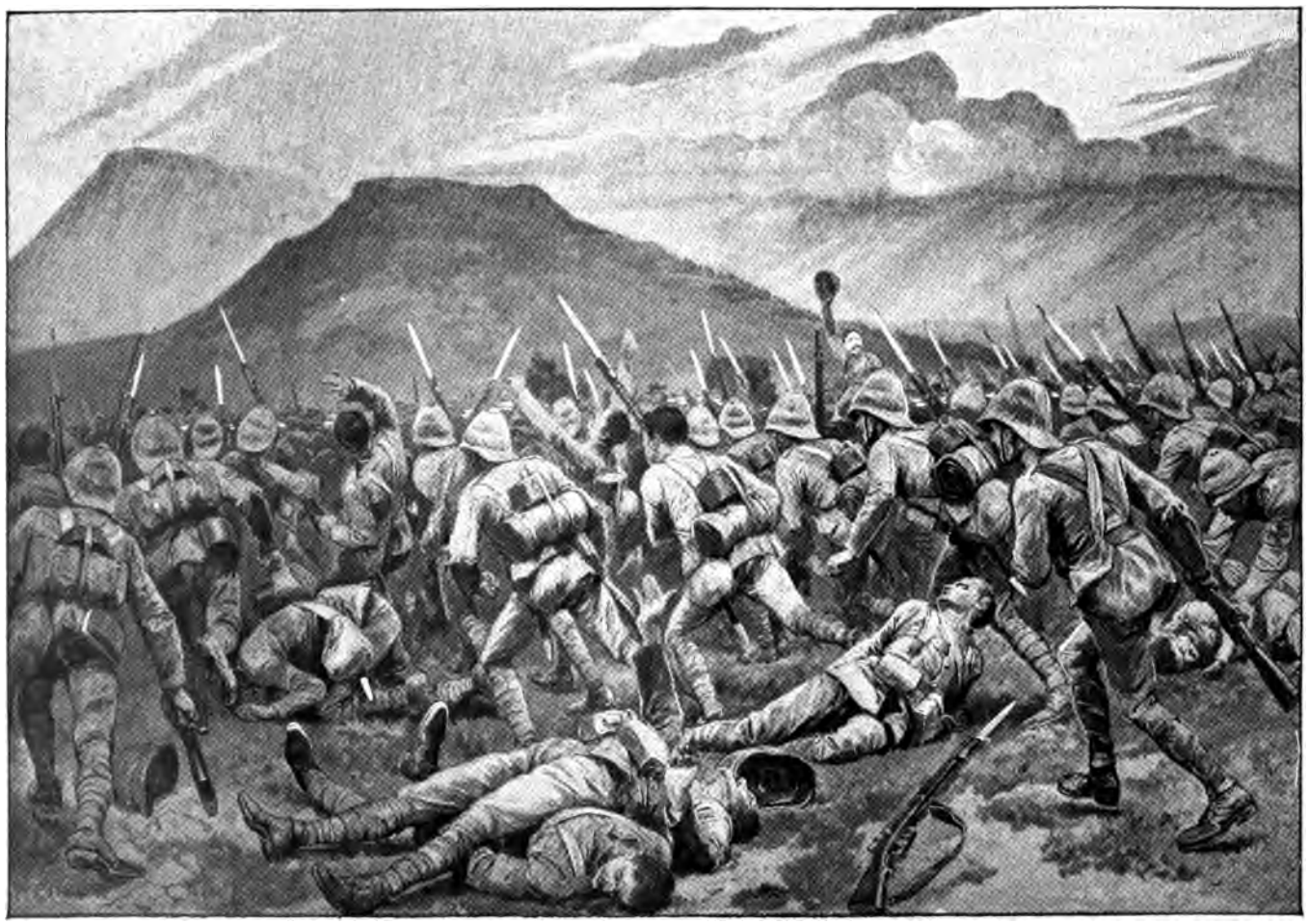
This constituted a dire peril to the garrison. For if the enemy kept possession of this hill until night they could be reinforced under cover of the darkness, fortify themselves, and soon make Cæsar's Camp untenable. Hamilton saw the danger. He saw that something must be done, so he went to Colonel Park, of the Devons, and said: "We must retake that position before nightfall." Park assented. "Do you think you can do it?" "I am willing," said Park, "to risk a charge." Then Hamilton, a skilful leader of infantry, pointed out the place to be attacked and the way to attack it; and Park saluted, turned on his heel, and went to gather his men together.

There were three companies, and they were the freshest troops on the field; for they had been fighting only for about six hours! They had also done about eight miles of marching. There were only three commissioned company officers—Captain Lafone (who had been wounded at Elandslaagte, and again by the bursting of the shell in the Devons' mess) led one company; Lieutenant Field (first at the guns at Elandslaagte) led the second; and Lieutenant Masterson the third.

"Men," said Park, "we are going to charge the enemy." And the Devons smiled a grim, wan smile; for this was a job they felt to be their own. The companies formed up, their officers leading; and Park took the front place of the whole battalion. They had to climb the steep brow of the hill, down which by this time the rain had made little rivers to run. The wind whistled and howled, and flattened itself against the hill. The rifles on the top vomited bullets. Field's company led. "Fix bayonets!" (Clang.) "Bugler, blow the 'Charge.'" The welcome notes rang out cheerily, and the Devons breasted the steep incline. It was a wonder how any man of them lived. But Park, the skilful, had left ten paces between the files, so as to give the marksmen plenty of room to miss; and the companies dashed on and up, on and up. So without many casualties the three companies, one behind the other, reached the crest. Now came the death and the danger. "Into line. Right form!" The three companies have become one line—a loose, brown line, bristling. There are 150 yards of almost level ground to cross—the saddle of the position—where no cover was, where every yard was open to the fire of those deadly marksmen.

The manœuvre is accomplished in a moment. Park springs to the front. The bugle sounds again; and the Devons dash madly after their beloved commander. He, like the dauntless leader that he is, waves his helmet and leads across the death-strewn ground. Now the Devons begin to drop. Lafone is hit, but still he leads his company. A fire opens not only from the front, but from both flanks; but the Devons heed it not. The men of the western shire shout fiercely as they race through the lead and rain. A man is down. He raises himself on his elbow and yells like one possessed, "Into them! Give 'em the steel!" He can no longer charge, but he can cheer.

Fifty yards, a hundred, a hundred and twenty covered, and still the bullets sweep our ranks. Park is still at the head, untouched and waving his helmet. His voice rises over the din of rifle-crack and yell. "Follow me, my lads!" And they



"THE DEVONS DASH MADLY AFTER THEIR BELOVED COMMANDER" (p. 400)

do follow him. And the Boers see the bristling line coming nearer—a hundred yards, fifty, twenty. In another five seconds the steel will be at their throats. And again their nerve fails them, and they run down the hill like sheep.

With one victorious cheer the Devons break line and follow. "That's for Majuba!" And the Boer falls on his face, pierced through and through. But not many fall to the bayonet's thrust. The farmers are in better condition than we, and can run faster. Besides, there are riflemen on both flanks who still keep up the desperate game, and bring down our men one after another. Field, a young officer who had already attained fame and distinction, is shot in the pursuit; and soon Park recalls his men, and bids them take shelter in the sangars they have so dearly won.

But these sangars are no protection from the flanking fire, and more men drop. Who will go and tell the Light Horse to pepper those fellows? Lieutenant Masterton steps out. Off he goes, back across that 150 yards of open, fired at all the way from both sides. Every single Boer rifle is turned on him. He staggers. "He is down!" No, he is not. Hit in two places, he still runs boldly on. Another bullet strikes him, and another, and another, but still he holds on his way. And at last he reaches the Light Horse position, delivers his vital message, and sinks to the ground, bleeding from eleven wounds.

We have heard and read of heroism, but never of anything more devoted than Masterson's running of the gauntlet.

The Light Horse now bring every rifle to bear on one of the enemy's flanking parties, and this one is speedily compelled to cease from troubling the Devons, who can now attend to the party on the other side. For half-an-hour or more there is firing, not without loss to us; for Lafone is shot through the head—a better man never led a company. And so each of the three companies is now led by a colour-sergeant. Park, who headed the charge so daringly, is the only officer left.

It is all over now. The two small firing-parties of Boers are silenced; and at last, at 7 p.m., Ladysmith is clear of the enemy.

The assaults on Wagon Hill and Cæsar's Camp were so vicious and so determined, so fierce and obstinate was the struggle there, that one is in danger of thinking that the southern attack was the only one made that day. But such was not the case. All day a grim and bloody fight had waged at Observation Hill. All day long shells from Pepworth and Lombard's Kop had pitched into the position, and a strong force of Transvaalers had tried to rush the position. Some reached it—or, at least, got within fifty yards of our trenches. But the Leicesters and the Liverpools who held the post were not taken by surprise. They declined to be rushed, they could not be hustled.

The daring stormers who advanced so bravely were shot almost to a man; and, keeping as cool as cucumbers and as steady as rocks, the Liverpools and the Leicesters clung to cover, and showed the Boers that it was not an easy task to take a fortified post in the face of rifle fire. Again and again parties of stormers came on, creeping from boulder to boulder, donga to donga, mound to mound, crevice to crevice. But as surely as one single man within one hundred yards showed a little bit of himself, so surely did that little bit become the target for a dozen rifles. Nor were the British riflemen such bad marks-

men as the Boers, by tradition, believed.

Wherefore, after about two o'clock in the afternoon, there was no more rushing. The Dutchmen altered their plan to one of crawling to within about 600 yards and keeping up a hot and steady fire upon the parapet of our entrenchments, which had the effect of compelling Sir George White to keep those entrenchments manned, and that is all.

As for the attack on the eastern defences, on the Helpmakaar side, it was practically a feint. There was some shelling, and some massing of troops, and some long-range sniping, but no real attack. Still, the mere threat of one was enough to compel the British general to employ troops there—troops which might otherwise have been sent to reinforce the garrisons of Wagon Hill and Cæsar's Camp.

At seven o'clock that night the battle was over. Seventy-nine dead Boers lay within our lines, and twice that number on the slopes of the hills and in the scrub by the Klip. Many more had been swept seawards by the rushing waters. And of wounded they had many a score. It was the bloodiest battle yet fought in the campaign; for the number of killed on the Boer side alone exceeded the total of both sides in any other battle.

As for the garrison, their losses had been great both in number and in value. Dick-Cunyngham, Digby Jones, Lafone, Miller-Walnutt, Field, were among the killed—every one of them shot through the head. There was not an officer of the Imperial Light Horse who had not been hit. The three companies of Devons who made the last charge lost 52 in killed and wounded out of 180 men who went into action. The Light Horse suffered no less severely.

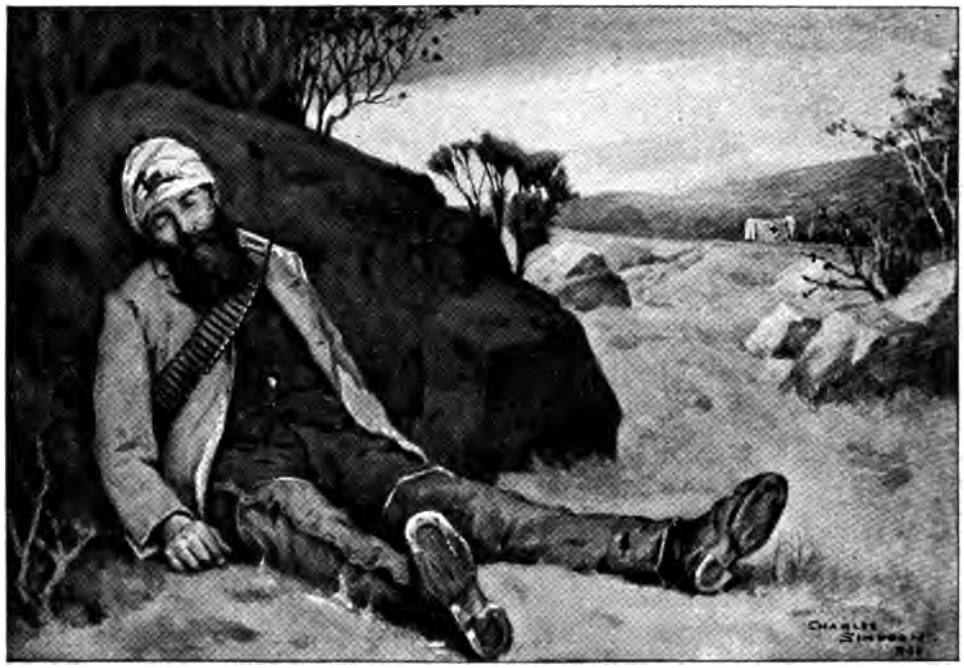
But the battle was won. The old flag still floated over Ladysmith.

And the Boers behind Bulwhana and the Free Staters behind the Middle Hill wailed that night for their dead. But the British on the blood-stained ridge threw themselves on the bare ground and slept amongst the slain. Flesh and blood could bear up no longer. They had, the most of them, neither drunk nor eaten for six-and-twenty hours. For nearly fifteen hours they had fought. They were weary of fight and of carnage, worn with hunger and fatigue. And so they bivouacked on the ground they had saved and lost, and saved again.

Who now could say that Britain's sons were degenerate? The wounds of the men of Devon, the corpses of the troopers of the Light Horse, the lifeless body of the subaltern of sappers, should bear witness. For of all the fighting that day—not even excepting the valiant onslaught of the Boers themselves—the greatest fights were these three; nor have our annals anything to show of valour and of conduct more worthy of record than the recapture of the emplacement by Digby Jones, the stubborn defence of the Imperial Light Horse, and the bayonet charge of the three Devons' companies.

Night fell: all but the pickets and the wounded slept. And God's rain fell and washed away the blood.

And the next day was the Sabbath.



FORGOTTEN !

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FRENCH IN CAPE COLONY—SOME SUCCESSES AND A DISASTER.

THE country in which General French, since his escape from Ladysmith, had been operating was that part of Cape Colony lying between Stormberg Junction and De Aar. De Aar is on the Kimberley to Cape Town main line, Stormberg Junction on the main line from the port of East London to Bloemfontein.* Between the two is Naauwpoort, on the line from Port Elizabeth to Bloemfontein ; and a few miles further south on the same line is Rosmead Junction. If you want to travel from East London to Kimberley by rail you take train to Stormberg Junction, change at Stormberg Junction and ride due west to Rosmead or Middleburg, change again and go north for a few miles to Naauwpoort, change again into a train that will carry you west and slightly north to De Aar. There you strike the Kimberley line.

So that the country between De Aar and Stormberg was important from a strategical point of view, because the occupation of it meant having the control of the lines by which the three British divisions (French's, Gatacre's, and Methuen's) could communicate with each other, could reinforce each other, and forward to any one division supplies from any of the three seaports of East London, Port Elizabeth, and Cape Colony. Unfortunately it hap-

* See Map, p. 25.

pened that this very country was seething with discontent and rebellion. The colonists there, for the most part, assisted the invaders, and, before a sufficient force of British troops could arrive, the Free Staters had overrun the land.

It was with this part of the invasion and this part of the rebellion that General French was sent to deal; and many a bloody encounter had his cavalry patrols with small parties of rebellious burghers. The force he had with him consisted mainly of cavalry—it was, in fact, the cavalry division,merely stiffened by the presence of two battalions or so of infantry. To say that General French—who had never, before this war, had an active command—handled his troops well is to say too little. It is not too much to say that he was the only commander in the field during the first three or four months of the campaign who seemed to have any idea of the proper strategy to be employed against the enemy. True he had, what other commanders had not, a highly mobile force, but his was the only force in the field where a proper system of scouting prevailed—where, to put it plainly, the General looked before he leaped. For French almost invariably surveyed with his own eyes the ground over which he meant to send his troops.

He manœuvred the enemy out of Naauwpoort. They tried to outflank him; he replied by outflanking them; and to prevent him getting between them and their base they had to retreat. They halted at Arundel, and again French beat them in strategy. General Joubert was in the habit of saying that British officers had no brains themselves, and did not give anybody else credit for having any—a South African version of the reported Napoleonic *mot* describing the British army as "lions led by asses." Like all sweeping statements, these could not be justified; but there was this of truth in them — that our officers were much too apt to rely on courage as the sole element of success. Of manœuvring an enemy out of a position most of them had not the remotest idea.

French had other notions of warfare, and he was fortunate enough to have in his division an exceedingly able lieutenant .n the person of Colonel Porter, of the 6th Dragoon Guards. On the 5th of December, having cleared the country on his flanks, he sent out the 6th Dragoon Guards, under Porter, together with a contingent of Mounted Infantry, New Zealanders, and Australians, to reconnoitre as far as Arundel, a place twelve miles south of Colesberg, and to see what force the Free Staters were in, what their positions were, and how the chances stood of clearing them out. The whole party went up by rail from Naauwpoort to within four miles of Arundel, then detrained, and moved north. The force was spread out wide, the Dragoons on the right and left flanks and the Mounted Infantry in the centre.

The sight of the long brown line sweeping over the undulating country was a splendid one, and whether for physique or horsemanship the Dragoon Guards were not one whit better than the Colonial forces. The position at Arundel was an ideal one for defence, consisting, as it did, of hills in circles, with high, flat country enclosed. Colonel Porter, seeing the strength of it, sent his cavalry sweeping round to right and left. The enemy was on the watch, however; and as soon as they saw themselves about to be outflanked they abandoned their hills, mounted their ponies, and galloped north.

It was late in the afternoon when our troops occupied the kopjes south of

the slope. Until ten a.m. the firing went on without any intermission, and then the Dutchmen seemed to tire somewhat. The scanty garrison dared not go down the slope to charge them with the bayonet; because the descent was so steep, that any man who showed over the almost perpendicular crest of the hill was an easy mark for those below. For four hours more the bullets flew up hill and down, until two o'clock arrived.

Then it was our turn to be seized with panic. Suddenly there appeared, right at our men's feet, over the crest-line, a number of the well-known slouch hats. The Boers had crept up unperceived in the steepest part. It was like a man standing on the roof of a house. He could see people on the other side of the street below, but not those immediately under the wall of the house; and the effect was as if a score of men attacking the man on the roof suddenly popped their heads above the eaves, having placed ladders against the wall. It was Majuba in miniature. Our men bolted back to the other slope; and what might have happened no one can tell had there not been on the hill an officer of the calibre of Digby Jones, the sapper.

Seeing our men's backs, the Boers let fly a volley with deadly effect, and then rushed for the gun emplacement once more. But the lieutenant of Engineers and Miller-Wallnutt, of the 92nd, stood firm. They rallied their men with stern words and cool, and soon the rank and file recovered from the panic. Then Digby Jones and the major of the Gordons, with a handful of men, rushed once more to retake the gun emplacement. A gigantic figure of a man, with a bandolier over one shoulder and a big leather satchel slung over the other, his enormous beard covering his chest, rose from behind the sandbags, raised a sporting rifle to his shoulder, and with quick aim fired at the towering figure of the Gordon officer. At the same instant a sapper pulled the trigger of his rifle. Miller-Wallnutt fell, his head shattered to pieces by an explosive bullet. The bearded Boer fell also, a hole drilled through his head. It was Villiers himself. He had fired 110 rounds from the spot where they found him, and his satchel was full of explosive-bullet cartridges—800 rounds of them.

Digby Jones rushed on with his little handful. A Boer, evidently of some authority, covered him with his rifle; but the sapper was too quick for him. He fired his revolver once, twice, and the Boer leader fell. It was Commandant Van Wyk, Villiers's second in command. Twice more the young British leader's pistol spoke, and two more bearded men bit the dust. The emplacement was won again—twice taken and twice retaken. But in the moment of victory the sword fell. The youth who had so nobly done his duty, and for twelve long hours had kept the foe at bay, who had twice rallied his broken forces by his firm, courageous demeanour, fell, shot through the head. He was cut off in the spring of his life. But how many men are there who have seen all life's seasons, and are dying peacefully amid the frosts of old age, who have done and suffered, and dared and endured half as much as this noble boy of twenty-two?

It was said that Ian Hamilton had determined to recommend him for the Victoria Cross for that day's work—as well he might. So Lieutenant Digby Jones died in the service of his country, an honour to his nation and to the Army. May Britain never want such men to uphold the honour

of her name and to prove her bulwark in the hour of trial!

Not only the two officers already named, but six men were killed in recapturing the gun emplacement, and others were wounded. Still, they retook the position somehow—nobody ever knew how. There was, however, a very serious state of affairs on Wagon Hill West. The gun emplacement was, as has been said, not on the flat-topped hill, but in the nek or saddle adjoining; and the Boers, by their sudden rush, had driven our men off the plateau. A message to Hamilton! Tell him the Boers have rushed the plateau, and that we only hold the nek. Tell him that we cannot possibly push them off without reinforcements, for our losses have been heavy.

AMBULANCE STRUCK BY A SHELL.

Hamilton grasps the situation instantly. He telegraphs to headquarters, and Sir George White despatches a squadron of the 18th Hussars to the rescue. This is the use made of cavalry in Ladysmith—to keep them in hand as a mobile force to be thrown wherever they are most wanted. Arrived at the hill the squadron dismounts, the men picket their horses, load their carbines, and hurry up to the nek. The reinforcement is more than welcome. Now for a British rush. The Gordons—what is left of them—burn to try the steel again, for Miller-Walnutt was their pet giant, and their colonel is lying dead two miles away. From boulder to boulder they spring—Gordons, Rifles, and Hussars, not forgetting the hardy Engineers—up the little slope. A shout, a rush, a thrust—two or three Dutchmen fall, and the plateau is ours once more.

For two hours more there is the old relentless musketry duel. There is some doubt whether Digby Jones has been killed or only wounded; and a brother officer, Lieutenant Dennis of the Sappers, crawls out of cover to look. Bullets whistle round him, but he goes on; for he

activity of the Boer sharpshooters was subdued. The infantry pickets on the inner hills were in communication with the camp by means of a wire laid by the Field Telegraph Corps, so that there was little chance of them being cut off.

On Monday, the 18th December, hearing that the enemy was on his right front at Jusfontein Farm, the general set out to reconnoitre, to see how many there were and what their artillery. The New Zealanders and C Battery of the Royal Horse Artillery comprised the force taken out, the former under Major Lee. Setting out in the early morning, the little force moved swiftly on Jusfontein and were soon in sight of the farmstead, where, according to our Intelligence Department, a commando had its headquarters. In quick time a gun was in action, shelling the place ; but neither rifle nor cannon replied. Wherefore a few New Zealanders scouted to the front, cautiously enough, because no one knew but that the Boers were simply lying low in the farm buildings. It was not so, however—there was not a soul to be seen about the house, though half-baked bread in the oven, and half-cooked meat on spits proclaimed that there had been inhabitants recently.

There were kopjes close at hand ; and General French conceived it possible for the Boers to be concealed there in force, with guns. And he ordered Major Lee, with his New Zealanders, to draw the enemy's fire—an operation which consists of riding up to your enemy's position, or sweeping past it, in the hope that he will shoot at you. What the general intended was for the New Zealanders to draw the shell fire of the enemy—that is, to ride within a range of, say, 4,000 yards ; but Major Lee, not knowing whether rifle or shell fire was meant, took it into his head to draw both. That stalwart body of horsemen rode, therefore, straight at some kopjes, making for a cleft in the ridge between two hills.

When they had ridden a little way up, they found this to be merely a kloof—that is, a deep cut in the ground with no exit at the other end ; and as they made this discovery, they made another. The enemy was in force. From the kopjes to right and left, from the summit of the ridge in front, a hundred rifles opened fire. They had, indeed, "drawn the enemy's fire"; and having drawn it, Major Lee decided that his mission was ended. He wheeled his troops to the right-about, and galloped back by the way he had come. Unfortunately, the little party had advanced some way up the kloof, and the Boers, true to their tactics, had allowed them to get well in before opening fire ; with the result that on the return journey they had to run the gauntlet of a bullet-hail from each side as well as from the rear.

Well was it for those gallant sons of the Empire that they could ride like the wind. Plying the spur, every head bending over the horse's neck, they flew for the opening. The Boer marksmanship does not seem to bear out the stories that have been told of it ; for nobody seems to be hit. Hullo ! a man down. Bradshaw, a trooper, has been struck in the thigh and drops like a rabbit. Another trooper pulls his horse up on its haunches to bring in the wounded man ; but Bradshaw lies on his back motionless, without sign of life.* On ! On ! Another man hit. "Hold him on his horse, somebody." Two troopers suddenly pitch head first over the saddle-bow ; their horses have been shot dead. "Jump up

* It turned out that he was not killed, but merely stunned by the fall from his horse.

REBEL COLONISTS ATTACKED BY FRENCH'S CAVALRY

here—my horse will carry two." Another minute, and the bullets no longer whistle past the ears of the horsemen, they only patter on the plain behind. It was a hot corner ; and the New Zealanders are lucky to have escaped with a loss so small as twc men wounded and two horses killed.

But now the R.H.A. join in the fray ; and so does a big gun from Taaiboochlaagte, the Boer position, four miles away. Their shells do us no damage, though they drop uncomfortably near ; and the horse gunners devote themselves to peppering the kopjes with shrapnel. The New Zealanders also try a little pot-shooting—ineffectual. The Boer riflemen on the hills give our men a warm time just now, and they themselves are experiencing something of the same kind, as shell after shell bursts over their position with mathematical accuracy. Of this they soon tire ; and presently make a bolt of it. They are rather more frightened than hurt though, for as far as we can ascertain our shrapnel has killed only two of them and wounded about a dozen. Upon which the reconnaissance ends, and French with his reconnoitrers return to Arundel Camp.

The New Zealanders are the envy of the whole camp ; for the general praises them for their steadiness under fire. And, indeed, these young cousins of ours from "down under" stood that terrible crossfire with the nonchalance of seasoned warriors. And the Army was proud of them.

For a few days after the Jusfontein reconnaissance French was very quiet. His patrols were perpetually reconnoitring and scouting, taking wide circuits to make sure that the Boers did not march round them, as they had tried to do the day Porter intercepted them ; but nothing of importance occurred until the 30th of December. The day before (29th), some of French's scouts had wriggled their way carefully up to Rensburg, seven miles further north on the line of railway, where the Boers had a laager ; and had found, to their great joy, that the enemy had gone away, bag and baggage, having moved up to Colesberg, where they had for many weeks been fortifying a position of great natural strength. One patrol party of four men of the 10th Hussars, under Sir John Milbanke, one of General French's aides-de-camp, scouted right up to the Colesberg position, and reconnoitred the hills there.

While trotting quietly forward amongst the hills a crack was heard on their left, and Milbanke felt himself hit in the thigh. He clung to his horse, however, and ordered the men to turn their horses and gallop back, for the rifles on the hillside were spitting fast and furious. Unfortunately they were not all Mausers. One, at least, was a Martini-Henry, and it was the heavy leaden bullet thereof that had entered the British officer's leg.

As the patrol turned, some of the Boer outpost hastily mounted their horses and galloped round the hill to cut them off. It was a race for liberty, and the Hussars plied the spur liberally. They were almost out of danger when a horse stumbled, and its rider was thrown out of the saddle. His horse galloped on. Milbanke, wounded as he was, turned and dashed back—for his horse had carried him some distance ere he could pull up—took up the trooper behind him, and made for the camp again. While the Hussar was mounting the Boers stopped, threw themselves from their horses, and fired shot after shot at the trooper and his rescuer. Luckily they were not good marksmen—probably they were a little excited, and their aim was unsteady—for

although Sir John had a hole made in his haversack, the bullets for the most part went wide and high.

Carrying a double burden, Milbanke's plucky charger yet made good speed, and rescuer and rescued were speedily out of rifle-shot. After that the trooper insisted on dismounting, took hold of his officer's stirrup, and sprinted alongside to the camp. It needs no saying that the camp rang with the exploit; and Milbanke, a modest man, was almost glad that he was invalided to Cape Town.

This was on the 29th of December. The next day French struck his camp and followed, and by seven o'clock on the morning of the 31st had pitched his tents at Rensburg Siding.

He did not, however, sit down idle for very long; for that very afternoon he himself moved out of his new camp to survey the country and to harass the foe. The general took with him two regiments of cavalry (10th Hussars and Inniskilling Dragoons), some of the Berkshires, one and a half batteries of the Royal Horse Artillery, and the never-idle Engineers. They struck west at first, and then north, until they reached Coles Kop, to the west of the town of Colesberg. To support and supplement the action of the general, another column, under Colonel Porter, pushed out of camp in the middle of the night, making for the south-west of Colesberg, and managed to get within 1,500 yards of the enemy without being discovered. Porter's force was composed of half a battery Royal Horse Artillery, the Carabiniers, and the New Zealand Mounted Rifles.

French reached his objective at night, and in the morning found himself close under a kopje held by a Boer picket. It seemed to the general that if he could take possession of the hill he would have a commanding position from which to attack the Boer flank; so immediately the day dawned he ordered up the Berkshires, and told them to carry the kopje with the bayonet. The Berkshire boys did not need to be told twice. They went for the hill at the double, stormed up it, and, as usual, the Free Staters hurriedly decamped when they saw the bayonets coming near. The Berkshires, having been out in the Colony a long time, knew how to climb kopjes, and they carried this one in great style, though disappointed not to have any bayonet exercise at the end of the climb.

It turned out as the general had anticipated. The kopje commanded the right flank (rear) of the Boer position, and it did not take long for a horse battery to follow the Berkshires and bring their pieces into action. Porter's half battery devoted its attention to the same flank, and soon a merry duel was in progress. The enemy had two quick-firers of the type known as "Pom-poms," properly called Vickers-Maxim quick-firers, which ejaculated one-pound shells with such rapidity that four or five of these annoying missiles would all be bursting at once. The Horse gunners enjoyed themselves vastly. They had a good position, a range not too long; they located the opposition artillery, and set to work to "knock it sideways."

First a beautifully aimed 12-pound shell smote a pom-pom, and dislocated it. One less. Then another dropped on a Boer 7-pounder and put it out of action. Then the R.H.A. made the ground too hot to hold the men who manned the other pom-pom; and so on until, after about three hours of it, the Free Staters either could not or would not stand to their artillery.

After that our two batteries devoted themselves to the enemy's trenches, and plied them vigorously with shrapnel all day. French was not strong enough to attack the strongly fortified hills held by the enemy, so he contented himself for the time with holding the ground he had won, and that night bivouacked there. His idea was to attack with infantry as soon as he was strong enough, covering his assault by the fire of his guns ; and he promptly telegraphed back to the camp for reinforcements.

It may seem strange that he should have been able to telegraph ; but so it was. For the general had with him a detachment of the Field Telegraph Department of Engineers, who carry enormous coils of wire rolled round drums. This they pay out as they go along, and are able in all kinds of country to give the commander telegraphic communication with his camp—a service almost invaluable.

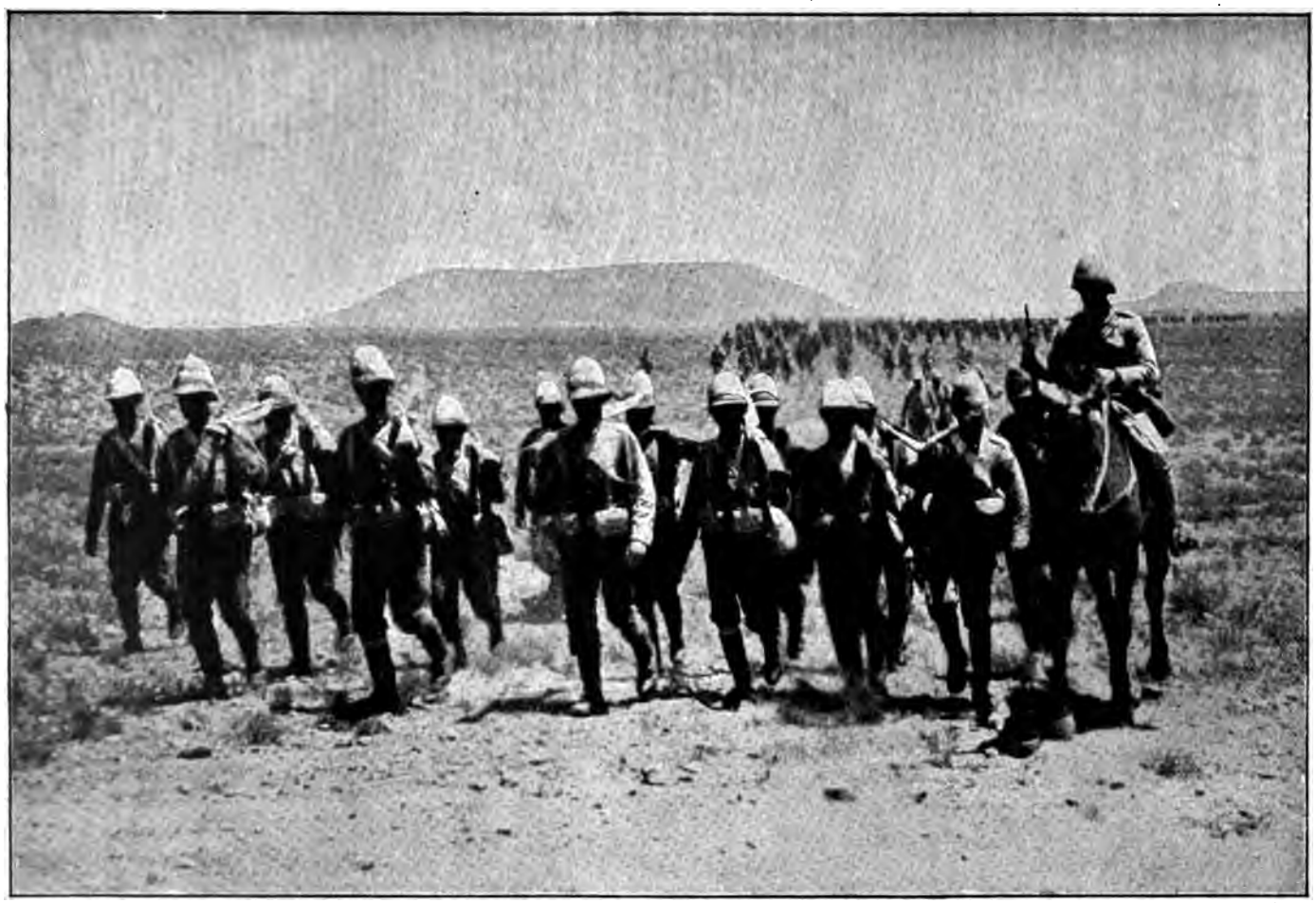
Now there was at Naauwpoort a battalion of infantry of the Suffolk Regiment, and this was ordered to the front to help the Berkshires and the New Zealanders to capture the kopjes. What befell this unfortunate battalion shall be told ; but for the present it is enough to say that the men—and the officers no less—were as pleased to go forward to the fighting line as a schoolboy to have an extra half-holiday. For a soldier loves nothing so much as to be in the thick of it. Wherefore, in the highest of spirits, the battalion set out by rail for Rensburg, arriving on the 4th of January ; and no sooner were they there than they were packed off towards Colesberg.

All those four days, from the 1st to the 4th of January, French had been shelling the enemy without intermission ; and the only reason he did not succeed in making Colesberg too hot to hold them was because he had not enough guns, nor guns of sufficiently heavy calibre. The R.H.A. guns are only 12-pounders. It was rather slow work for the rest of the troops, who practically only formed an escort to the guns. But when, late on the afternoon of the 4th, the Suffolks arrived, it was felt that something would happen soon.

Something did happen !

The Eastern regiment was commanded by Colonel Watson ; and he, anxious to do something to show what his boys were made of, asked permission of the general to make a night attack on Grassy Hill, which was the key of the enemy's position. It was, in fact, the same hill from which Milbanke and his patrol had been fired on. Now, General French was no great believer in night attacks—at any rate, in this country and against this enemy. He had before him the awful warnings of Nicholson's Nek, and Stormberg, and Magersfontein. But Colonel Watson represented to him that the position, being the key of Colesberg, would have to be stormed sooner or later, and pressed his view in favour of a night attack with the bayonet on the ground that an attack in the daytime would of necessity involve great loss, while a night assault, besides being in the nature of a surprise, would certainly render nugatory the marksmanship of the Boer riflemen.

As before stated, General French had no great belief in night attacks, as far as this campaign was concerned. His experience at Elandslaagte had been that British infantry, taking due advantage of cover and spreading out in widely-extended order, could take any kopje in South Africa. But the hill had been well reconnoitred ; Watson was confident of his



THE REMNANT OF "H" COMPANY, SUFFOLKS, ORIGINALLY 100 STRONG. [*Photo: Alfred Hosking.*

ability to take; a night attack, if successful, is the least expensive way of storming a stronghold. So an attack by four companies of the Suffolks was ordered for the night of January the 5th.

Colonel Watson, knowing full well that surprise was of the essence of his attack, made no movement and no preparation at all in advance. There were natives—Kaffirs—in the British camp, who were by no means either trustworthy or trusted; and had one of them become possessed of the information that an attack was on foot he would doubtless have found means to let the Boers know of it. Wherefore Colonel Watson kept the matter to himself, not even taking his major into his confidence until about two hours before the men were to be on the move. It was almost midnight when the order was passed round to A, B, D and H Companies to make ready; and at 12.30 a.m. the four companies were on their way.

Silently, swiftly, cautiously they marched through the darkness. The ground had been splendidly reconnoitred, the features of it were known, and the direction was taken and kept with the greatest possible accuracy. Within about 1,000 yards of the top of the kop, the colonel gave the officers final orders, which were, briefly, "Attack in column of companies.* Use silence and the bayonet." The march had hitherto been made without the least opposition. The company commanders now "dressed" their companies and prepared to attack. Fifty paces were to be left between each company, so as to avoid the close packing of quarter-column, and at that distance the column started. It was, however, pitch dark, and the men in the rear companies were eager, so that by the time 900 yards of the 1,000 had been covered the battalion was in something like quarter-column formation—an almost solid mass of men, with only a few paces between each line.

Up the hill in the darkness the British infantry toiled, their muffled footfalls the only sound upon the stillness of the night. No watchful sentry spoke a challenge; nor sight nor sound came from the Boer lines. It was too dark to be told accurately, but the Boer position could not be far off. The men were breathing hard. Their hearts thump-thumped with excitement. The adjutant touched his bugler and whispered him to be ready to sound the charge. Up. Grimly up.

And then from less than forty yards in front a rifle cracked. Then a shout arose, "The *rooineks!*" and into the dense files of the Suffolks poured a volley, then another, and another. The colonel, well beloved of his men, shouted "Remember Gibraltar, my lads!" and spoke no more.

It is not easy to over-estimate the effect of that cry "Remember Gibraltar!" on the men of the Suffolk Regiment.

When they were the 12th Regiment of Foot, they had taken part in the famous siege, and had helped with conspicuous bravery and fortitude to hold the Rock for Britain. And on collar and colours they bore the badge of the castle and key in a laurel wreath, with a crown surmounting it, and underneath the word "Gibraltar." Their motto, "*Montis insignia Calpe*," further bore witness to this ancient exploit of their regiment. Wherefore, when their well-beloved colonel called upon his men to

* An attack "in column" means an attack by a body marching with its units one behind the other. Thus a battalion attacking "in column" would have its companies marching one behind the other, at a distance of the frontal width of each company.

"Remember Gibraltar," he appealed to them in a fashion that reached their hearts.

The Suffolks, surprised and hard hit, still did not falter. They threw themselves on the ground to let the volleys pass over them, seeing from the flashes ahead that the Boer entrenchments were not far away, and trusting to receive the word to charge.

Instead there came the word "Retire!" And the astounded soldiers, hearing it, turned and fled down the hill. They did not understand the order; but it had been given, and they must obey. But it was no English officer who uttered that command; it was the old familiar ruse of the foe; and the Suffolks, new to the work, were beguiled. Not all, however. For there were some—about a quarter of the little body and all the officers—who remained on the hillside, firing at the enemy. It was now just daylight, and for the first time the British saw what sort of a position it was they had come to storm. In front of them rose a high wall with a trench in front, the wall being loopholed in two tiers—a position practically impregnable against infantry attack except in case of a perfect surprise.

Here there was no surprise, for it was evident that someone had warned the defenders, and consequently the attack failed. It must have failed, indeed, even if the main body of the Suffolks had not retired; but the failure might not have been so costly. As it was, the colonel and three other officers were killed, three company commanders out of the four were taken prisoners, and the fourth, Major Graham, was hit in two places. In addition, the Suffolks mourned the loss of 26 killed, 45 wounded, and 76 missing—more visitors for Pretoria.

The failure of the enterprise was not to be ascribed to the colonel of the Suffolks in any degree. His plans were laid well enough to have succeeded. It was just one of those pieces of hard luck which everyone has to face, and the soldier more than anybody. Certain it is that Colonel Watson's death was a great loss to General French, and particularly to the Suffolks.

The effect of this disaster was to check the triumphal progress of General French for some time. Hitherto he had harassed, outwitted, and outmanœuvred the enemy, causing the Boers to lose confidence. For nothing except actual defeat lowers the spirits of an army more than being perpetually outmanœuvred. Now the drooping spirits of Free Staters and rebels alike revived, and it was noticeable that thenceforth they faced the Silent Cavalryman with much more confidence and pluck than they had heretofore displayed.

It was the first and last time they had the better of him; but to beat him once was some encouragement to them.

And it may be said that the Boers deserved their victory. They knew that this hill was the key of their position. They thought it likely that an attack by infantry would be made. And so they had fortified the post with the greatest skill and ingenuity. The cleverest part of their arrangements was this—they had erected their loopholed wall in such a position that it could not possibly be seen from the plain, nor indeed from the hillside by anyone who was not within about fifty yards of it. A balloon reconnaissance was, in fact, the only kind to be of use; and that was not available for General French.

Thenceforth General French trusted solely to his own judgment in the command of his division; and had less faith than ever in night attacks.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

WITH BULLER—THE NATAL CAMPAIGN (*continued*).

AFTER his repulse at Colenso, Buller had retired to Frere camp, keeping an advance camp at Chieveley, and had there lain down to recuperate his forces and to wait for reinforcements. He was in an almost hopeless frame of mind, as his heliograms to White showed. To the Home Government he sent a message of the most pessimistic kind. He expressed the opinion that he was not strong enough to relieve Ladysmith with his present force, that Colenso must either be surprised or besieged; that his infantry could not fight far from camp because of lack of water. He continued, "I consider I ought to let Ladysmith go, and to occupy good position for defence of South Natal, and so let time help us." Further, "my men are dispirited because they have not seen a dead Boer"; and so on, in a spirit of despondency so foreign to the British character, and so unlike Sir Redvers Buller himself, that Queen Victoria's advisers might have been excused if they, too, had been panic-stricken. Fortunately they were not. They telegraphed at once, "The abandonment of White's force and its consequent surrender is regarded by the Government as a national disaster of the greatest magnitude"; and went on to urge a renewed attack, "not necessarily *viâ* Colenso." They also promised more troops immediately; and directed to Natal certain troops originally intended for the Colony.

Buller's spirits soon rose again. He over-estimated the enemy's numbers—he thought there were 20,000 opposed to him when there were, in fact, not half that number. He imagined, for some reason or other, that he would not be reinforced to any extent. He believed, despite White's assurance that the Ladysmith garrison had 70 days' provisions, that in fact they had nothing of the kind. That the Devonian acted in the way his friends expected him to act cannot be urged. The Government lost confidence in him the moment they received the telegram from which I have quoted—naturally enough. And well was it that the telegram was kept secret until the dark days were past. But to the military historian the blame to be apportioned to the defeated General would be on account of his strategy and his tactics.

Colenso, as Buller well said, was a fortress. It was almost impossible to capture it by assault. On the North bank of the Tugela were trenches and forts so strong, that to attempt a frontal attack on them was midsummer madness. Yet this is what Buller had done. And all the time the key to the whole Colenso position was the hill which Dundonald's troops had all but captured, when they were called back. Whoever held that hill held the Colenso position.

The fault to be found with General Buller is not that he did not do his best; but that his best was not a good best. If the magazine rifle had been non-existent, there might have been another tale to tell. A rush, a frontal attack after the manner of Frederick the Great, might have done something. Unfortunately, the magazine rifle had been invented. Another mistake, of the gravest kind, was the abandonment of Long's guns. It would not have been difficult to leave a

strong party of infantry to guard them, and at night to bring them away.

Arrangements were at once made to strengthen Buller. More cavalry was sent from England. The South African Light Horse were taken from "guarding communications" in Cape Colony, and sent to the front in Natal. The Imperial Light Infantry was also added to the forces. And guns of heavy calibre were promptly despatched from England. In addition, the War Office sent out Sir Charles Warren, an experienced South African officer, to assist Buller.

The Devonian meanwhile kept in touch with the enemy. His scouts were out and about, gaining knowledge of the ground between Chieveley and Tugela, and scouting for miles to the north-east and north-west. And when he knew that he was to be suitably reinforced, and to be given an army big enough for the work in hand, the "Red Bull," as his men affectionately called him, once more addressed himself to his task with earnestness and renewed vigour.

A "FOOT PARADE" AT ESTCOURT.

There is this to be said for Buller. Despite the fact that he had been beaten, and rather badly beaten at that, his army never for one single moment doubted that he would in the end lead to victory. The Irish Brigade, despite its terrible cutting up at Bridle Drift on that bloody 15th of December, was by no means so severely shaken as was the Highland Brigade after Magersfontein, and the reason was that in the one case confidence

in the commander was unshaken, in the other it was not.

So the army of Natal made itself as comfortable as it could in Frere Camp over Christmas and the New Year, having quite made up its mind that "Old Buller" would launch his brigades at the foe pretty soon, and that when he did Ladysmith would be relieved.

Every day the naval gunners, by way of keeping their hands in, deposited a few shells in the Boer position. These guns had not been taken back to Frere, but had been left at Chieveley, whence they could with ease drop lyddite into Fort Wylie and into Colenso, and the trenches in front of the Boer positions. Encouraged by their success, and thinking probably that the British were somewhat intimidated, the Boers grew bold, and parties of them occasionally raided our territory, coming fairly near to the camp. On the 20th and the 21st December there were two affairs of outposts of a grimly amusing character. A picket of seven men of the 13th Hussars was stationed on a kopje in the middle of other kopjes a long way east of Chieveley camp. About fifty Boers crept round the kopje, got to the rear of the picket, and fired into it. Two men were killed, and the others managed to resist until reinforcements were sent. The next day nine of the Natal Carbineers went out to the same spot and carefully concealed themselves. They lay there in hiding from dawn until late in the afternoon. They left the bodies of the two slain Hussars lying on the ground, feeling quite sure that the Boers who had shot them would come to steal the accoutrements. So it befel. The Carbineers lay very low until a large party of the enemy put in an appearance. The Boers sent out scouts, who approached cautiously until they saw the two bodies lying on the ground just as they had fallen. The sight was enough to convince the raiders that there were no British in the neighbourhood, so they advanced boldly. One of them was just stooping over one of the Hussars when a bullet from a carbine shattered his head. At the same instant eight other carbines spoke. A second Boer brought down—two others seriously wounded. Then the main party came up, and the Carbineers, having killed, crept to their horses and rode gleefully back to camp.

On the 22nd Lord Dundonald went out with two guns and some cavalry, with intent to intercept a raiding patrol of the enemy; but he was only successful in despoiling them of their booty—a large number of looted cattle. The Boers themselves slipped through his fingers, declining battle. On the 24th there was another little affair of outposts, of which the Boers had much the better—the capture of two officers and a picket of the South African Light Horse. The days passed thus in surprises and counter-surprises, raids and counter-raids. The cavalry division under Lord Dundonald, which included the Colonial mounted troops, had most of the excitement: for their camp remained at Chieveley, within about three miles of Joubert's outposts, whilst the rest of the army was at Frere.

Christmas Day brought its festivities, its eating and drinking and making merry; though the Army thought many a time and oft of their comrades shut up in Ladysmith, with whom they had hoped to share their Christmas fare.

The naval gunners had by this time got the range of the Boer position at Colenso to a nicety, and kept the Dutchmen in a fairly constant state of terror by their

searching fire. The two 4·7's were frequently fired at night into the slumbering camp and town, the direction being marked off by means of lighted candles stuck so as to indicate the places at which the shells were to be fired. Thus the Boers became afraid to leave their bomb-proof trenches and shelters, or to go into Colenso to sleep in the comfortable houses there.

When the New Year dawned, Buller's army was almost fit to move. To begin with, he had at last got some motive-power other than railway engines and oxen—the one of which tied him to a particular line of advance, while the other was terribly slow, not to say cumbrous. Ten new cross-country traction engines had been sent out from England: powerful machines that could move across rough country at eight miles an hour in dry weather and at about five in wet. Each of them could draw a load of about twelve tons, and draw it, to boot, up hills that oxen could not face. Guns had also come up, including a howitzer battery and more field guns, until the general had at his command some sixty guns.

With the improved transport and the additional artillery, reinforcements of men had arrived also, and the British force in Natal for the relief of Ladysmith amounted, in the first week of January, 1900, to about 30,000 men. Sir Charles Warren, with a whole division, was moving to the front, and camp gossip proclaimed that as soon as he arrived a move would be made. Meanwhile the Boers, being assured that the next movement would not be an attack on the Colenso position, but rather an attack on some one of the drifts higher up the Tugela, were fortifying those drifts assiduously, and making of every hill for miles round a little Gibraltar.

The British irregulars delighted in very much the same kind of work that the Boers themselves excelled in, and were no mean proficients in the arts of sniping and taking cover. They could move about the country without being seen by Boer scouts and pickets in a way that Tommy Atkins could not, or, at all events, did not, and did not try to do. And during the long wait between the battle of Colenso and the next move these troops accomplished more than one daring exploit. A party of fifty of them, of Thorneycroft's Horse, every man of the half hundred a sharpshooter, brought in the New Year in a manner peculiarly their own. On the 1st of January they stole north from Frere, bore to the right, and, by dexterous steering, arrived at a spot to the north-east of Colenso and about 500 yards from the river, without being seen by the enemy.

Then they betook themselves into a nice deep donga, where cover was plentiful, hid their horses, and opened fire. It was only about 1,000 yards from the Boer fortifications at Colenso, no very great distance for such riflemen as these; and, as they commanded the rear of the Boer position in the village, they worked considerable havoc. The sniping upset the nerves of the Dutchmen—gave them a sort of stage-fright, in fact; and they blazed away with machine guns and rifles for a long time. But Thorneycroft's men were so well concealed that the Boers could not see them; and, as they were, of course, using smokeless powder, there was nothing to show the enemy where the sniping came from except the sound and the bullet wounds.

In consequence, they opened a well-directed fire on a point about a quarter of a mile distant from the donga, and kept it up until they must have wasted 10,000

cartridges. Then the fifty, not a penny the worse, any of them, returned joyfully to Frere, feeling that for once they had scored.

Not to be behindhand, on the same day a picket of the S.A. Light Horse stalked a Boer picket near Hlangwane Hill, and shot five through the head, discreetly running away when a whole Boer commando hurried up to support their picket. Had the whole campaign been left to irregulars it would have been one endless succession of ambushes, sniping-parties, surprises and ruses, continued until such time as the last Natal sniper had stolen a march on and got first shot at the last Boer sniper, or *vice versâ*—which might have happened in the year 1950—perhaps.

Even with a regular army this kind of thing was not without its uses. The idea was to reduce the wily Dutchmen to the frame of mind in which he would never know what was going to happen next, to keep him continually on the alert, to give him plenty of false alarms—until one day, when the real alarm came, he would think it was only another cry of "Wolf! Wolf!"

On the same day as the donga scare before related, about 200 of Thorneycroft's rode within rifleshot of Colenso at half-past nine in the evening and suddenly let fly a volley, while the naval guns, having got the range and direction, shelled the river-side trenches for half an hour. This was a "new feature," as the advertisements have it. The operations of the naval guns had been pretty constant up to that time, but had only taken place in the day time. The daily practice of the sailors was something of this kind :—

About daybreak, the officers in command of the guns would come down, with the crews of the guns at their heels, and spy about with their powerful telescopes in a northerly direction. As soon as a clump of Boers could be seen in the open, and not more than about four miles away, the 4·7's would be sighted, aimed, loaded and fired. The sailors rarely missed, and the reason they did not do more damage than actually was the case was twofold—firstly, because if the shell did not happen to pitch on a hard place it buried itself without bursting, and secondly, because the Boers did not show themselves much within range. There was no doubt that lyddite shells were the most effective for shelling rocky kopjes; for those on bursting blew the boulders and rocks to little pieces, and hurled them in every direction; but where the soil was soft, the shells often buried themselves deep in it without exploding.

After the 1st of January, there was little of moment done until the 6th—little, that is, in the way of operations by any of the troops. But the time was not being wasted. Buller and his staff were planning the next move; and planning it in the greatest possible detail.

On the 6th of January, that day of storm and stress, there came flashing across the hills in the scanty sunlight a message from the north. It was from White at Ladysmith, and this is what it was :—

"9 a.m. Enemy attacked Cæsar's Camp at 2.45 this morning in considerable force. Enemy everywhere repulsed, but fighting still continues."

The day was hazy, and the clouds rendered further heliography impossible for a time, so that the relieving army knew not how the garrison was faring until a couple of hours later, when another sun-telegram came :—

"11 a.m. Attack continues, and enemy has been reinforced from south."

A BATTLE IN A THUNDERSTORM: BULLER'S DEMONSTRATION

In about another couple of hours the further news came :—

"12.45 p.m. Have beaten enemy off at present, but they are still round me in great numbers, especially to south, and I think renewed attack very probable."

And finally a short flicker :—

"3.15 p.m. Attack renewed. Very hard pressed."

Then the sun went behind the gathering rain-clouds, and no more messages came ; but it was evident for another two hours that fighting was in progress. For the boom of the heavy guns could be heard in the distance as the heavy Krupps and Creusots threw shells at the British entrenchments. Then all was quiet ; and that night the commander-in-chief in Natal knew not what had been the fate of the garrison of Ladysmith. It was an anxious time.

And all Britain shared his anxiety ; for during the rest of Saturday and the whole of Sunday (6th and 7th January) the sun was hidden ; and men went about asking, "Has White been beaten ?" The suspense of that Sunday was terrible and heart-straining. "Hard pressed !" Nobody knew what the sequel had been, but every Briton was sure that neither White nor his troops would have been beaten without a tremendous struggle.

All this time the men of Ladysmith were mournfully rejoicing, and burying their dead, while funeral hymns arose from Pepworth and Bulwhana and Middle Hill. And when at last, on Monday (January 8th), the news came through of a decisive and severe defeat for the invaders of the Queen's dominions, the British Empire resounded with a chorus of joy and thanksgiving.

For Sir Redvers Buller, only fourteen miles away from his comrades in distress, the situation was peculiarly hard. He felt responsible to himself, to the Army, to the Queen and to the Empire, that Ladysmith should not be captured ; and there he was, within sound of the warning guns and unable to lend a hand to save his comrades. He was like a man on a rocky shore, who sees, almost at his feet, a ship being broken to pieces by the storm, while he himself must stand there, unable to help or to save the doomed crew.

What could be done was done. After the receipt of the third message, "renewed attack very probable," Buller ordered a "demonstration" in force. His own pickets and look-out men at Chieveley had reported that they had seen parties of Boers galloping from Colenso along the Ladysmith road ; and this fact, together with White's messages indicating that the assault was chiefly from the south, went to show that the enemy were detaching men from the Tugela positions to reinforce the attack.

If Buller's force had been as mobile as Joubert's, it might have been possible for him to throw his whole army at the Tugela trenches while they were thus weakly held. But it was not so mobile. And the only thing possible to be done was to turn out the force at Chieveley and make a feint attack towards Colenso. This might induce the Boers to believe that a real attack was intended, prevent them from sending more reinforcements to Villiers at Ladysmith, and haply make them recall in haste the troops already sent.

The main British force, being back again at Frere, was too far away to do anything. Had the camp been within striking distance of the Tugela there would have been something more to write of than a demonstration.

At one o'clock the order came from Buller (who was at Frere) to Dundonald and Hildyard and Barton at Chieveley to march out and to support their demonstration by a hot fire from all available artillery. Instantly trumpets blared throughout the camp. The men threw themselves into fighting trim instantly, for many thought that the moment had come to cross the Tugela. At two o'clock (p.m.) the force was on the move.

It consisted of one squadron 13th Hussars, some Mounted Infantry, Bethune's Horse, the S.A. Light Horse, and Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry. There were also five battalions of infantry and three field batteries. The naval guns were already in position to shell the trenches. The plan of operations was for an advance by the infantry, preceded by the mounted troops in a cloud to clear the way, scout, and drive off all advanced patrols and parties of the enemy. Such actual fighting as was to be done was to be done by the guns.

The infantry did not know this, however. They did not know that their officers had strict orders not to become really engaged with the enemy. On the contrary, they all imagined that Buller, with some of his Frere troops, had suddenly swooped down on some point higher up the river, had captured a drift, and was now actually crossing the Tugela. In fact, they imagined their movement to be a part of a real attack all along the line ; and they marched out jauntily.

The cavalry and mounted infantry trotted out in widely extended lines, with the S.A. Light Horse in the centre, Bethune's and the Natal Carbineers on the left, and the 13th Hussars, with Thorneycroft's, on the right.

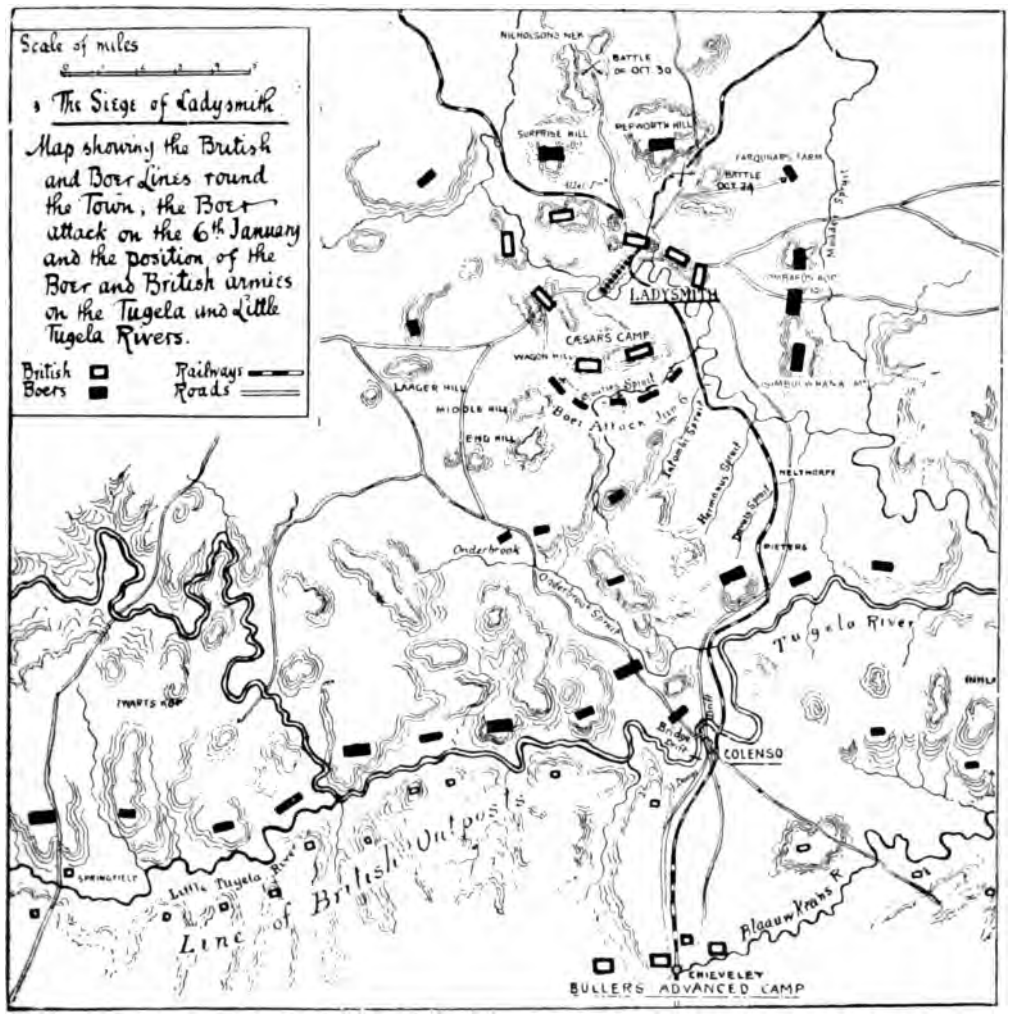
The advance was one that would have excited the wondering amazement of the Iron Duke and not less of his great French rival. They would probably have moved their men out in a thick columnar formation, as though to throw a heavy mass of troops on a single point. But the magazine rifle has rendered the daylight attack in column an absolute impossibility ; and the 7,000 men or so of the Chieveley force were spread out over an enormous area.

First there was a sort of fringe of mounted patrols. Then the main body of cavalry in a single line, and last the infantry—two Fusilier battalions on the right, split up into four lines of half a battalion each, with six paces* between men in the lines and ten yards between the lines. This was a kind of open order not known to the drill-book, but forced on the British generals by stern necessity. It made, of course, the task of the officers very heavy, and left a great deal to the intelligence and steadiness of the individual soldier.

Hildyard had three battalions of his brigade on the left, in much the same order, and he advanced on Colenso, while the right attack made for Hlangwane Hill. The field batteries trotted gaily forward along exactly the same route as had been followed by Colonel Long and his lost batteries on the day of the Colenso fight, but they did not press so far forward. Instead, they unlimbered about a mile behind Long's position, and at once began to pour shrapnel into the Colenso trenches.

The naval guns had been at it for some time. Unlike their messmates in Ladysmith, the Naval Brigade at Chieveley had no reason to be sparing of ammunition. Nor were they. They threw hundredweight after hundredweight of lyddite into

* A pace was thirty inches ; so that six paces would be five yards. The pace in quick time is now 33 inches.



BULLER'S CAMP, AND OUTPOSTS AT THE TUGELA.

Colenso and over the Tugela at Fort Wylie and Grobler's Kloof.

Now the Boers took alarm. Seeing the advancing host, hearing the boom of the cannon, and feeling the bursting of the shells, they, too, thought an attack afoot. They sent messengers in haste to overtake the men who had set out for the Ladysmith assault. Their thin-backed ponies were seen galloping full speed from the laagers to the trenches, and ere long the Mausers spoke out. One thing, however, the Boers would not do. They would not fire a single cannon. So that our gunners, who were longing to engage in a duel with theirs, were disappointed. For not one single Boer piece could be located.

It was late in the afternoon ere the

British attack developed. A few of Hildyard's men got within rifle-shot of the Colenso trenches; and their fire, together with the shrapnel of the field batteries, silenced the Boer marksmen there. Shots were also exchanged on the right. The storm that broke over Ladysmith (see p. 391) extended also to Colenso; and the trenches were washed by the heavy rain what time they were being pelted by the British bullets.

Then, soon after five o'clock, dusk befell, and soon the darkness; and the troops that had moved out of Chieveley with so much pomp and circumstance moved back again. The men in the ranks were not well pleased at having this trouble all for nothing—as they imagined. It savoured to them of that Duke who "had ten thousand men. He marched them up to the top of the hill, and he marched them down again." But in point of fact the demonstration had not been useless. It had prevented the Boers from sending any more men to join in the assault on Wagon Hill and Cæsar's Camp, and had, moreover, secured the recall of several bodies already on their way there.

It was the most the Relief Force could do to make the demonstration. And it was little enough, in all conscience. But it was something, and on a day like the 6th of January and in a case like the case of Ladysmith, every little helped. It is just within the bounds of possibility that had a reinforcement of (say) 3,000 troops arrived to join in the southern attack on Ladysmith at about half-past four in the afternoon, the defenders might have been overwhelmed. They might not. And the greater the odds against them the greater, no doubt, would have been their steadfastness in defence. Still, it is not improbable that the demonstration from Chieveley averted a very ugly accident.

Next day (January 7th) Warren's division arrived at Estcourt, and on the 9th it moved up to Frere. It consisted of two brigades of infantry under Generals Coke and Woodgate, one squadron of the 15th Hussars, five batteries, and detachments of sappers. What was more significant, on the 8th there came up from Durban 700 volunteer ambulance bearers, and on the same day all sick and wounded in the hospitals at Frere left for the base hospital. This implied that the general expected soon to have need for all the field-hospital accommodation at his disposal, and pointed to the fact that the enemy was to be immediately attacked—and that in force.

But exactly when and exactly how was not known. People said, "Buller has a plan," but what that plan was could only be guessed at, for the secret had been admirably kept. One thing only was pretty certain—that the movement was to be an attempt to turn the enemy's flank—a movement involving a departure from the railway line and the direct road. So much was obvious from the fact that supplies for three weeks were packed in transport waggons. When this rumour spread, everybody in camp said, "We shall be in Ladysmith within three weeks."

One other thing was patent—that Barton's Brigade was to be left in front of Colenso to hold it: to keep the Boers in check in the front. It was patent, because that brigade had been moved up to Chieveley, and was now (January 7–10) busily engaged in entrenching its position there. Earthworks were thrown up by the redoubtable sappers and miners, bomb-proof shelter-pits and trenches were dug out and roofed over, rifle pits, parallel and horizontal trenches, block-houses (made of

iron) were constructed ; and, in fact, every precaution was taken to render the position impregnable. This was a necessary measure, because, if the main body of the army moved out for a few miles to strike at the enemy's flank, the mobile foe might well retaliate by crossing from Fort Wylie and the trenches north of the Tugela at Colenso, raiding the camp at Frere and coming round on the rear of the flanking force.

On the 11th (January) the plan developed. The forces had been divided thus :—There were (exclusive of Barton's Brigade) two infantry divisions—to wit, (1) Sir Francis Clery's Division, consisting of Hildyard's English Brigade and Hart's Irish Brigade—magnificent troops whom you have heard of before and will hear of again ; and (2) Sir Charles Warren's Division, consisting of Lyttleton's mixed Brigade and Woodgate's (Lancashire) Brigade. Each division was accompanied by three field batteries Royal Artillery and a detachment of the ever-ready, never-cease-working Sappers, together with a squadron of the 13th Hussars. If there was a fault to be found with the composition of these divisions, it was in the scantiness of artillery.

Besides these, the Earl of Dundonald had a cavalry division—better called, perhaps, a mounted division, for many of them were really mounted infantry ; and it was made up largely of Colonial troops. There were two regiments of regular cavalry—the 1st Royal Dragoons and the 14th Hussars, four squadrons of the South African Light Horse, one squadron Imperial Light Horse, Bethune's and Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry regiments, one squadron each of the Natal Carbineers and the Natal Mounted Police, and one company of the 60th Rifles, mounted. In addition, Lord Dundonald had six Colt machine-guns, mounted on carriages of his own design—carriages of simple but ingenious construction, light yet strong, and calculated to bear rough usage without being immobile.

Last of all, there was a mixed lot, Corps Troops, being really a kind of Artillery division. It comprised one field battery and one howitzer battery, ten Naval guns (two 4·7's and eight 12-pounders), with Coke's Infantry Brigade of three battalions, the remaining squadron of the 13th Hussars, and a very strong detachment of Royal Engineers. And there were, of course, numerous Army Service Corps men, men of the R.A.M.C., including the 700 volunteer stretcher-bearers, and other necessary non-combatants. Altogether, a fighting force of 22,000 men (3,000 of them mounted) and sixty guns. But again one must remark on the artillery. There ought to have been another battery, at least, of heavy guns, and some Horse Artillery.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE SIEGE OF KIMBERLEY—TWO SORTIES AND A GREAT LOSS.

WE left Colonel Kekewich and his gallant garrison in a moment of victory, when they had been teaching the invaders of the Colony a sharp lesson at the bayonet's point.

Let us now see how they fared while the Empire was bestirring itself for their relief.

In one respect the colonel of the Loyal North Lancashires had before him a more difficult task even than the heroes of Ladysmith. For although Sir George White had against him the larger force of the Boers, led by their most skilful commandants and furnished with the best of their artillery, yet he had at his disposal a large British garrison, including some 12,000 of the finest troops in the Army, not to mention such well-drilled irregulars as the Imperial Light Horse. Colonel Kekewich, on the other hand, had at his disposal only 500 regular troops and less than 4,000 irregulars, of whom more than half—the Town Guard—could not be called upon to do anything except strictly defensive work. Another 250, the Kimberley Light Horse, was a body raised in the town after the siege had begun.

There was also a conspicuous deficiency in artillery, both as to numbers and calibre of the guns, for the garrison could only muster twelve 7-pounders and a dozen Maxim guns. It hardly need be stated that none of these could compete with the Boer Krupps and Creusots.

Photo:] [*Browning, Exeter.*

THE MAN OF KIMBERLEY.
LIEUT.-COL. KEKEWICH.

With this artillery and these men it was absolutely necessary to man a line of defence thirteen miles long—a task sufficient to discourage the bravest. One advantage, however, the commandant of Kimberley had, and that was in the presence of enormous heaps of earth, the *débris* of the mines that were the source of Kimberley's wealth and Kimberley's peril. These formed ready-made earthworks with the assistance of some Kaffir labour; and Kimberley felt itself able to withstand any assault and any siege so long as provisions held out. And be it said that for some reason or other the Dutchmen who invested the Diamond City for four whole months were so wanting in enterprise as not to deliver one single assault upon it. Apparently they expected to cause it to surrender either by bombardment or starvation, or else from sheer despair at the absence of relief.

As for the spirit in the town, it was excellent. There was no love lost—and there had not been for many a year—between the settlers of British blood and those of Dutch extraction, and the British garrison of Kimberley, civilian as well as military, were not altogether sorry that war had broken out; for there would be, they felt convinced, such an exhibition of Britain's might as would put a stop for ever to Boer bluster and swagger. To emphasise and illustrate this sentiment, here is a quotation of a line or two from the correspondence of a sober, douce young Scotsman, a resident in the Diamond City:—

"19th October, 1899.—Hurrah for the war! . . . We have had a most exciting time, and I should not mind if the Boers were to hold us isolated for another six months, but surely John Bull will get a move on now that they can see what sort of Johnnies we have to deal with. I wish —— were in a Boer prison, or could even see what atrocities they are capable of doing, and I am sure they would back the Government for once. I am writing this with rifles and bandoliers all round me at one of our redoubts, with an old programme pencil, but doubtless you are all only too glad to get even this scrap of a letter from us in far-off besieged Kimberley. . . . It is just possible I shall get potted, yet there is not much danger, and, as it is a good cause, I am sure you do not blame me for joining the Kimberley Town Guard. . . . My hours of sodgering are at present rather trying. One day I am off four hours, and the other two. Of course, we have to sleep out in the open. I get a bit of gardening done. I do not see why my broad beans and potatoes should go to ruin, simply because a few thousand cowardly Boers have hemmed us in. We have only about 500 Imperial troops here, but we have almost every man in the place under arms, and I defy all the Boers in Africa to take Kimberley. We expected a go in yesterday. About 1,000 of the Boers appeared in a kopje a few miles off and planted a couple of guns against Kenilworth.* It was thought these two guns would be better in Kimberley. Three hundred mounted men went off full tear at them, but the Boers skedaddled, and they had to come back without a shot. Our water supply is cut off, but we can get along for drinking purposes very well with our wells. I expect by the time you get this Kimberley will likely be away from the seat of war, and we shall be reading the news much the same way as you are."

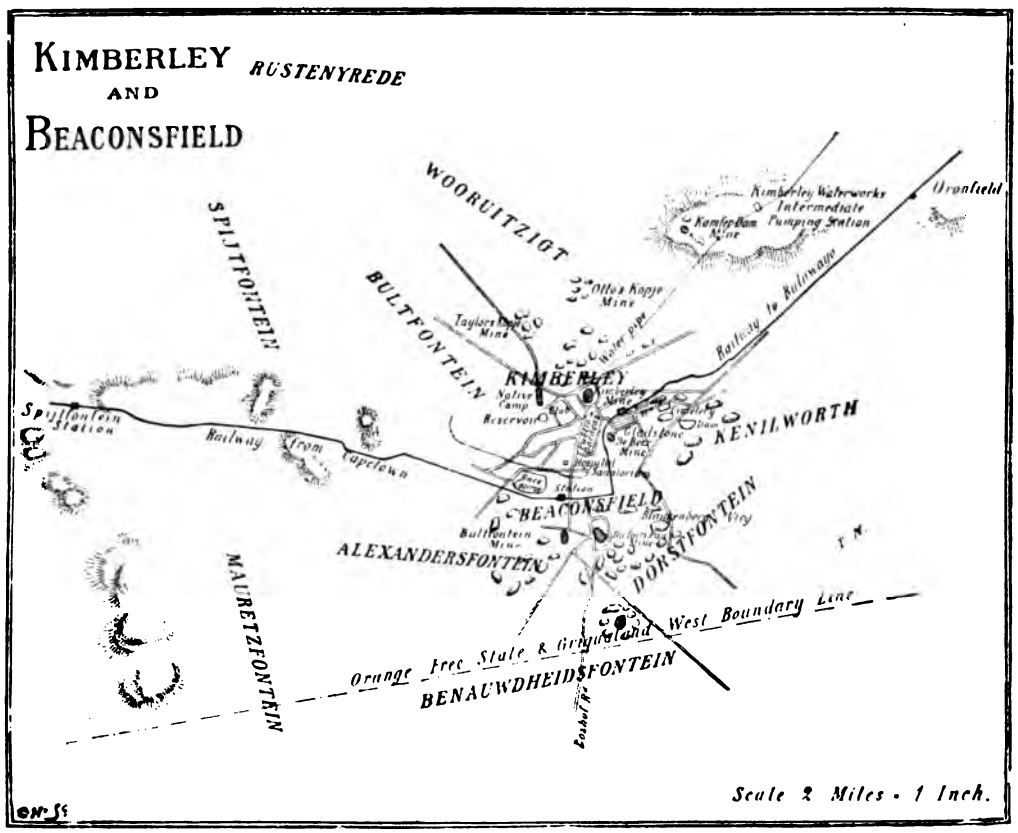
There is cheerfulness for you! Thorough British careless cheerful confidence. "All the Boers in Africa could not take Kimberley," with its absurd little garrison of "500 Imperial troops," and "almost every man in the place"—to the number of less than 4,000. It would soon be over, this siege set up by the atrocious, cowardly Boers, who skedaddled as soon as 300 of John Bull's boys start out to tackle about 1,000 of them. The water supply cut off! Bless you! it is a bagatelle. And our Scot, with the imperturbable thrift and industry of his nation, declines to be hustled out of the propagation of his garden stuff.

And this was the spirit in which the townsfolk as a whole took the siege. The whole proceeding was a move of farcical absurdity on the part of two impudent little Republics which imagined themselves the hub of the universe. Wait until "John Bull got a move on." Then you would see the process of killing a beetle with a steam roller.

* A suburb of Kimberley, where the writer of the letter resided.

As for pluck—like all the rest of the garrison, our private in the Town Guard has no lack of it. He is quite willing to take his chance, you observe, of being "potted," though for his part he sees very mob of "cowardly Boers"—even though the discomfort is not very great nor the danger very pressing.

Discomfort is, of course, a comparative term; and there are many, not exactly



MAP OF KIMBERLEY AND BEACONSFIELD.

little danger of such a thing happening. Nor does he grumble at being put on "sodgering" duty for twenty or twenty-two hours a day. What an eloquent story is told by these figures of the scantiness of the garrison. Yet there is a slight feeling of annoyance apparent in the writing. It is too ridiculous that a town flying the British flag should be thus "held up" by a sybarites, who might find this kind of thing the reverse of luxurious living: "I wish you could see me doing 'sentry-go' in the dead of night, and not a soul to be seen. We have about eight men posted round our fort. One feels a bit eirie in the 'wee sma' hours,' although it is our visiting guards I am afraid of passing, not Boers. We all sleep in our togs with our

bandoliers on (with fifty rounds in), and our rifles at our side."

Well might he be "afraid of our visiting guards." For all was not cheerfulness and comedy, and eerie sentry-go and gardening. There was tragedy waiting at hand. A few days afterwards our Scotsman records: "A very sad accident happened the night before last to one of our sergeants. He was visiting the outposts, and was accidentally shot through the heart by one of our own men, who mistook him for an enemy."

And on the same day (October 21st), with the same confidence so noteworthy of all colonists of that day—all British colonists, at any rate—that the Imperial Government had only to wave its hand and the earth would quake, he writes: "I suppose in a few days now we should have reinforcements."

After the skirmish or sortie of the 24th October, when Botha was slain, the spirits and confidence of the garrison and townsfolk rose even higher than before. True, there was a strain of melancholy. "Two of the wounded," writes our Town Guardsman, "were friends of mine. It brings war pretty near when one's neighbours are beginning to get shot." And he adds that the rain of the previous night, "though good for one's garden"—he dearly loved his kailyard—made it "very miserable lying out." And already, with the siege hardly begun, he adds: "It is about time more Imperial troops were here. But I suppose we must be patient." Such is the depressing effect of a wet night spent in the open! Did the Kimberley folk imagine, one wonders, that Imperial troops could be sent—as the Irishwoman tried to send her son's boots—by telegraph.

Very soon the siege began to grow monotonous, and the six months' isolation of which our private of the Town Guard wrote so gaily in the second week of October had begun to be regarded with a different eye before the month was quite out. For we find him writing: "Life is beginning to get weary in camp." But although the townsfolk and the members of those forces like the Town Guard, who were confined to purely defensive work, might find the siege monotonous to the point of being tame, the more active corps certainly did not. Kekewich's general plan of defence was offensive. It was to keep the enemy always on the alert. Never to let him rest. Pounce out on him on the south-west one day; make a demonstration in the north-east the next. On Monday give him a dose of armoured train; on Tuesday night sally out and rush one of his works with the bayonet. Keep him uneasy. And it was a good policy enough. For your Boer hates nothing so much as being hustled.

Our chronicler continues: "An old Dutch friend of mine brought in the bodies of two of our men lost in the skirmish the other day (24th), and he told me about finding one—Leopold—and almost crying over it. Leopold is a youngster of twenty, of German parentage, and his parents, who are at Worcester, Cape Colony, do not yet know of his death. Their last letter to him entreated him not to join any volunteers, and yet he would join. It is incidents of this kind that bring home what war really means, and yet in Africa it had to come, and South Africa is nearer peace and prosperity to-day than ever she has been."

It was on November 1st, the day by which our hopeful Scot had thought to be able to telegraph to Cape Town, that the real rigours of the siege first began. On that date the colonel commandant took

over the whole food supply of the town. He did not compulsorily acquire the wee kailyard of our North Briton, for we read a few days later that vegetables being unobtainable in Kimberley, that enthusiastic agriculturist utilised his four hours' leave by walking down to Kenilworth and there procuring fresh greenstuff.

Truth to tell, Kimberley was none too well victualled to stand a siege. It would have been even more badly off had not the railway traffic superintendent, a civilian named More, two days before the cutting of the railway line, run down to Modder River and there taken possession of a few train-loads of flour, which he expeditiously transported to the threatened city.

The lack of heavy artillery was bad; the shortness of provisions much worse. And the absence of the one and scarcity of the other arose from the same cause—the downright refusal of the responsible Government of Cape Colony to believe in the possibility of war, and to make preparation for the outbreak of it. Not until the forty-eight hours' ultimatum was actually delivered did the Cape Ministry make the slightest preparation. And after the delivery of that famous missive there was very little time or opportunity to do anything effective.

Mr. Schreiner was the Prime Minister of the Cape Government, and on his head the townsfolk of Kimberley heaped malediction. "I wish we had Olive Schreiner's brother here to-day in Kimberley for an hour. It is his fault that we are in this plight to-day." Thus our Scotsman; and he only wrote, and wrote in moderate, temperate language, the sentiments of all the people of Kimberley. Still, though all blamed the Cape Prime Minister for the plight of the town, there were many civilians who blamed Colonel Kekewich for what they were pleased to term his "hoarding" of victuals.

The chief of the garrison had, of course, only one idea, and that was to hold the town for the Queen until relief should arrive. And he knew that such relief could not possibly arrive at the early date anticipated by the civilians. He knew that an army column takes a long time to be organised, and is, and must be, comparatively slow in its movements. Wherefore he deemed it best to take possession of all food-stuffs, whether of necessity or of value as comforts for the sick, and to issue rations to the whole population. Not anybody on the British side dreamt, nor, probably, did any one on the Boer side dare to hope that four months would elapse ere Britain raised the siege of the Diamond City—still less that for half that period 10,000 British troops would be within a dozen miles of the town, yet unable to reach it.

Colonel Kekewich's precautions as to economising the food supply were amply justified by the events; and the Boer flag must certainly have waved over Kimberley had those precautions not been taken. In fact, all through the weary siege, the colonel of the 1st Loyal North Lancashires acted with the greatest caution, the greatest discretion. And if Robert George Kekewich did not quite catch the eye as did his brother-in-arms, the Man of Mafeking, yet the defence of the colonel of Foot was every whit as masterly in its way as the tactics of the prince of Scouts. And there was placed on record at a later date the opinion of one whose word had value because he never either praised or blamed without good reason; one who did not distribute compliments and pats on the back to deserving and undeserving alike; but who made his praise worth having by

the discrimination with which he bestowed it. Lord Roberts of Kandahar wrote :— "I am of opinion that the greatest credit is due to Lieutenant-Colonel Kekewich for the able dispositions which he made for the defence of Kimberley, an unwalled town spread over a wide area ; for his rapid organisation of an auxiliary force which, in conjunction with the regular troops, enabled him to keep the enemy in check ; and for the tact, judgment, and resolution which he displayed throughout the siege."

The day after the stringent military measure aforesaid, horsemen were seen riding towards the town. "Who are they ?" "Boers," says someone. "Not a bit of it. See, they ride in order. Those are drilled men." And a thrill ran through the town. Relief! Relief! No more short commons. No more "sodgering" for twenty hours or more a day. Let every man return to his broad-bean patch. The little band—it must be merely an advanced patrol—are Cape Police. British, sure enough, as said the man who discerned drilled men. Alas ! the hopes raised were soon dashed. The handful of Cape Police had ridden in from Uppington, dodging the Boer patrols. But they brought no news of succour, no promise of speedy assistance from Mother England.

For a few days nothing of importance, except that the Boers were busy mounting big guns on the kopjes about five miles from Kimberley proper. Their numbers were now considerable, and rumours percolated into the town that 1,500 more, under "the redoubtable Cronje," as our Scot calls him, were on their way from Mafeking. The artillery officer in command of the Boer guns was one Major Albrecht, an Austrian adventurer with some skill in gunnery, and at that time in the pay of the Free State.

On November 4th, having mounted several guns, the Boers sent into the town a white-flag messenger bearing a summons to surrender, and a notice that all women and children must be cleared out of the town within twenty-four hours. At the end of that time the bombardment was to begin. This twenty-four hours' notice is required by the law of nations ; and the only charge that could be made against General Joubert was that he started shelling Ladysmith without such notice. Had it been given in accordance with the practice of civilised nations, Sir George White might have sent away all women and children. As it was, he had to keep them and feed them.

Colonel Kekewich, however, did not take advantage of the proposal. "Our guns will protect our women and children," said he. Women and children are for some purposes a great nuisance to a besieged city, and form the chiefest of the anxieties of the commander of the garrison. But (and these observations are purely from a military point of view) in one respect the presence of these encumbrances is helpful. Husbands and fathers, brothers, sons, and sweethearts will fight more grimly and determinedly if they imagine that there is the least likelihood of their womenkind falling into the hands of foes who would harm them. And many of the Kimberley people—whether justly or unjustly is not the question here—thought as our canny Scot thought when he wrote: "Certainly I would not like *my* wife to get into the hands of South African Boers."

It was not expected that the Boers would be quite so prompt as their demand suggested, for November 5th was the Sabbath, and the Boers generally observed the day as such. On this particular Sunday there was a concert in Kimberley,

THE GUN AT THE DE BEERS MINES, KIMBERLEY.

organised to raise money for those in dire poverty through the siege. Our Scot went. He was not in dire poverty, for the De Beers Company, in whose employ he was, continued to pay full wages though they could not work their mines. With much pathos our North-countryman observes: "But they (the De Beers Company) collar our Government 5s. 10½d. a day"—that is, the "sodgering" pay. So the private of the Town Guard purchased two tickets—with a pang of his North-British conscience, it seems, for he says, "It seems funny for Sunday." He was fortunately saved from the sin of listening to the music. "We were all seated, waiting for the concert at four o'clock, when the alarm went, and I had to fly back to the Fort." No Sunday concert for him after all. One imagines that he found the entertainment actually provided even more "funny for Sunday."

For it was on that first Sunday of November, immediately on the expiry of their twenty-four hours' notice, that the Boer guns began the bombardment of Kimberley; and next day they continued the operation. There was no "leave" for any member of the garrison on Sunday night or Monday. The pickets were posted and exhorted to be particularly watchful; and every other man slept in the fort or entrenchment to which he was posted—his rifle ready to hand, himself fully dressed, ready on a word to spring to arms.

Mr. Rhodes had organised a supply of water for the town by pumping it from one of the De Beers mines—the Wesselton—and the supply was sufficient to allow about eight gallons per head per day—a large quantity, apparently, but by no means more than enough. There was no risk of drought, but for purposes other than drinking and cooking the town was not too well off. Our Scot remarks that a bath was a luxury—"the greatest luxury in Kimberley"—and that sometimes six or eight men had to use the same water, after which it was carted round to water gardens and trees and shrubs.

The Boers evidently knew of the existence of this supply—there were traitors even in Kimberley—and the first bombardment was directed at the mine, with intent, no doubt, to cut off the town's water. But the shells did no damage. For three days the shelling continued, and the loss to the beleaguered town was even less than that occasioned by the besiegers' guns on the first day's bombardment at Mafeking. For at the little Bechuanaland town blood was drawn—the blood of the historic "one dog"—while at Kimberley the Boer gunners only contrived, in three days, to smash one cooking-pot. The explanation was that the guns used by the Dutchmen could not carry into the town itself; and in addition they were badly served. The shells, also, were not well fused, and generally fell into soft soil, where they penetrated to the distance of from fifteen to eighteen inches and then—sometimes—burst. There were in Kimberley the inevitable small boys, who amused themselves by running about and picking up fragments which they sold as souvenirs. Prices ruled high in those days. Three months later fragments of shell could not even be given away.

The most noticeable event of the first three days of the bombardment, after the serious loss of the cooking-pot, was the dropping of a shell amongst a group of cattle feeding near the reservoir. The demeanour of the herd showed how there are differences between members of the bovine family. Some of the oxen never even lifted their heads to investigate the

matter; a few looked up for a moment and chewed the cud of amazement; while one or two young heifers threw out their heels and gave tongue. But in two minutes the whole herd had turned its attention once more to the succulent herbage, wondering, no doubt, what on earth might be this newest freak of the two-footed creatures.

The British R.A. men regarded the efforts of the Boer gunners with amusement—not to say contempt. "I sh'd think they're all a lot o' bloomin' ammertoors," was the comment of one bombardier. "An' so's the coves wot filled the shells, I sh'd sye. They are practysin' a bit, that's all." And the bombardier spat on the ground. It was the only way he could find of expressing his supreme professional disdain for what he was pleased to call the "orkardness" of Albrecht's gunners.

The firing on the Wesselton mine, indicating as it did the presence of traitors in the town, caused Colonel Kekewich to call in all the arms from non-combatants, and to be very careful about issuing passes, especially to coloured persons. The natives —of whom a large number were employed in the diamond mines—were a constant source of anxiety, though they were useful enough as labourers. They were, for the most part, not natives of the Kimberley district, but were in the habit of coming to work on the "floors" of the De Beers Company for a specified period—say six or twelve months—after which they would return to their kraals.

The only people really alarmed by the bombardment were some of these natives, and on the 8th of November about 500 of them, who had been clamouring to be allowed to go away, were sent off at about 1 a.m. They passed through the British, and trekked off towards the investing lines. But the Boer sentries were on the alert. "*Wie gaat da?*" One or two of the blacks crawled sinuously through and got away; but the greater part were stopped. Taken before the head commandant, Wessels, who sternly demanded why they were there, the headman of the natives begged permission to be allowed to pass home with his tribesmen. "No!" said Wessels, sternly. "Go back and get fed by the *rooineks*." The headman tried to negotiate, but was only told, with grim humour, "Return! If you can come back here and bring Rhodes with you you can all get through!" Wherefore the blacks, crestfallen, sneaked back to Kimberley; and thereafter the natives were much quieter than ever before. "Cecil John," wrote our diarist, "is a thorn in their sides; but they are much too frightened to try and get at him."

On the same day (November 8th) the colonel commandant took the strong step of calling in, by proclamation, all arms in possession of persons other than enrolled members of the garrison. The ostensible object was to secure that nobody should commit acts of hostility except members of some part or other of Her Majesty's Forces. Warfare by private persons on land is on much the same footing as piracy at sea. But the real object of the calling-in of arms was to secure the disarmament of a number of disloyal persons—some Afrikanders of Dutch extraction, some foreigners, whose attitude caused the authorities a good deal of anxiety.

For a whole week the shelling continued, at the rate of over 100 shells a day, but the Town Guardsman complains that "siege life is very monotonous." In fact the monotony, and the rather changeless diet, chiefly composed of bully-beef and mealies, were the only causes of complaint

in those days. There were some narrow shaves. A Mr. Grant would remember the day when he was riding in a cab, and a shell, coming clean through the wall of a second-hand dealer's shop, killed the cab-horse. In the second week of November the besiegers received reinforcements, fresh bodies of Free Staters (under Commandant Du Plessis) and Transvaalers (under Delarey or De la Rey) joining the original force ; and by November 16th it was calculated that at least 8,000 Boers were around Kimberley. They began to draw their circle somewhat closer ; and their guns had now only a range of 6,000 yards to drop their shells into the town.

On the 16th Scott-Turner—whom our Scotsman is proud to claim "as a fellow-countryman, a Perth man (Black Watch)" —who commanded the mounted troops, took out two detachments of his horsemen, with two Maxims and two field guns, and a body of the Town Guard as escort for the guns, to have a look round in the direction of Alexandersfontein. They found the enemy in the scrub, had an artillery duel with him in which he lost two men, and exchanged rifle-shots. Our only casualty was Captain Bodley, shot in the leg by a bullet. The thing chiefly noticeable was that the Boers, though well entrenched and artfully concealed in

A NARROW ESCAPE FOR THE QUEEN : HOLE MADE BY THE ENTRANCE OF A SHELL.

scrub and rifle-pits, fired wildly, "blazing away hundreds of rounds of ammunition to no purpose."

Rumours were now floating about the town that a large force of British was advancing by the railway line from the south. Skirmishing proceeded daily round about Kimberley, especially in the direction of Kenilworth, and on the 23rd a reconnaissance in force by the Kenilworth Village Guard tried to "draw the Boers" into disclosing their numbers and position—as usual, without success. But natives had now come in with news of the fight at Belmont, and the garrison was elated. Colonel Kekewich had received tidings of Methuen's advance, and to help him when the relieving force crossed the Modder River it was decided to make a sortie. Meanwhile Cronje, with 3,000 men, was making a forced march from Mafeking in order to throw himself between the relief column and the beleaguered town.

On November 23rd, at about 3 a.m., Scott-Turner took out the whole of his mounted troops for a sortie, supported by nearly all the guns in Kimberley. The man from Perth was lucky enough to find the Boer pickets asleep, and he passed them without giving the alarm. The position selected for attack was Lazaretto Ridge, and Scott-Turner took his men to the foot of it, dismounted them, and told them he was going to rush the entrenchments with the bayonet.

Now there was something humorous in this, because the British, except a few men of the North Lancashires, were all irregulars, recently enrolled. They could ride well enough, and handle the rifle; but the bayonet was new to nearly all of them. A sergeant actually started then and there to teach his section the bayonet exercise — surely the most extraordinary comic-operatic proceeding that ever happened in a war.

Presently came the order, "Fix bayonets!" "Charge!" With a cheer, the men rushed forward. The handful of regulars went up like a moving wall, with a line of steel points in the front. But the irregulars! That was another story. Some, by instinct or genius, managed to fix their bayonets; but the others, unable to accomplish the feat, yet unwilling to be behind their comrades, bolted for the entrenchments, swinging rifle in one hand, and carrying the bayonet dagger-wise in the other. Surely the maddest bayonet charge ever delivered. The Boers were fully awake by this time; and ere the bayonet-bristling line had far advanced it was greeted with a hot fusillade. Scott-Turner was in the front. "Charge!" he shouted; and then "Steady!" for some of the irregulars were outstriding their comrades, and a charge must be delivered as one blow. Up the hillside the Britons rushed, eager and full of fight, and once more the Boers refused the hand-to-hand combat. Some put up a white flag; and, when our men advanced openly to receive the surrender, other Boers poured in a volley. Our men, exasperated, answered the fire, and soon the surrender was an accomplished fact; the Kimberley garrison had some prisoners to feed, and the Kimberley Irregular Forces had taken their first lessons in bayonet exercise. They improved at the game afterwards, as you will see.

A Boer laager was about 300 yards behind the ridge, but Scott-Turner did not try to capture it, for fresh forces were hurrying up against him, and his ammunition was not too plentiful. In fact, it was quite as much as the sortie party hoped for

to return to the town in safety. To cover the retirement an armoured train, under Lieutenant Webster of the Lancashires, sallied out, and turned its Maxims and rifles upon the reinforcements. Thus Scott-Turner returned in safety, having driven the enemy back a little, and scared him somewhat.

The armoured train aforementioned was a product of local enterprise. There was in the town of Kimberley an engineer named Labram, a man of craft and ingenuity, the chief engineer of the De Beers Company. This gentleman contributed not a little to the saving of the town. He constructed two armoured trains. He devised the apparatus for pumping the water from the Premier Mine at Wesselton into the town. He made plant for the casting of shells ; and finally he procured from Heaven-knows-where a book on big gun construction, and started drawing plans and sketches, and making calculations as to "resistance," "recoil," and other such matters. For the Kimberley garrison was sorely outranged in the matter of artillery ; and the ingenious engineer was of the school of geniuses to whom nothing is impossible. He had an idea that he could supply the want.

Methuen was now within striking distance ; and on the 25th of November, the day he essayed to cross the Modder, Colonel Kekewich resolved to help him by making a strong sortie from the town. This was one of the triumphal days of the siege.

The indefatigable Scott-Turner was to lead the attack, which was officially described as a "reconnaissance in force." The Diamond Fields Light Horse, the Cape Police and some Engineers, set out towards Wimbledon at dawn. They found the enemy unprepared again, and the men pressed on and on until at last they were within rushing distance of the first work of the Boer line of entrenchments. The advance was a piece of very skilful leading. Taking advantage of every rise in the ground, of every ridge and kopje, Turner kept his men quite concealed, until with a rush they sprang right into the earthwork.

The triumphant shout of the British as they swarmed into the position was the Boers' first warning of the assault ; and, surprised in their slumbers, they could make no resistance—or only a very feeble one. A few seized their rifles that lay ready to hand with magazines charged, and fired desperate shots ; but the greater part made no show of fight, and fled for their lives. Then British rifles cracked, British steel flashed, and in one breathless half hour 100 Boers lay bleeding on the ground. The tale of prisoners was twenty-nine, and with these the victors returned to Kimberley. The whole town turned out, and gave them a royal reception.

But there was a sad side to the business, as witness the handwriting of the chronicler of the kailyard : "There were eight coffins this morning (26th November), and I believe three men reported missing were all found dead afterwards. The Boers lost very heavily. Poor old Collier"—one of the slain Light Horse—"leaves a widow and four young children. Knowing the killed makes such a difference in hearing or reading of such an engagement, and makes one realise the horrors of war." Do not imagine, however, that this taste of "the horrors of wars" abated one iota the courage and determination of the towns folk. "I hope none of you have had any fears of Kimberley's safety." Discomforts now were unheeded. To the irritation felt at first had succeeded a grim determination to hold on so long as a man had

V. R.

PROCLAMATION.

WHEREAS

It has been brought to my knowledge that Her Majesty's enemies have issued Proclamations declaring that the territories of Griqualand West and Bechuanaland now form portions of the Orange Free State and the South African Republic,

Now Therefore,

I, ROBERT GEORGE KEKEWICH, Lieut.-Col. Commanding Griqualand West and Bechuanaland, make it known that if any such Proclamations have been issued they are of no effect whatsoever, and do not in any way alter the status of British subjects in the aforesaid British territories of Griqualand West and Bechuanaland, and if any British subject is found to be assisting Her Majesty's enemies by word, deed, or in any other manner whatsoever, such person will be dealt with as a base rebel, and will be summarily punished as such.

Given under my hand at Army Headquarters, Kimberley, this 20th day of October, in the year of our Lord, 1899.

GOD SAVE THE QUEEN.

R. G. KEKEWICH,
LIEUTENANT-COLONEL,
Commanding Griqualand West and Bechuanaland.

V R.

PROKLAMATIE

TERWIJL

Het wordt aan my bekend gemaakt geweest, dat de vyanden van Harer Majesteit, Proklamaties uitgevaardigd hebben, verklarende dat de grondgebieden van Griqualand West en Bechuanaland, nu vormen gedeelten van de Oranje Vry Staat, en van de Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek.

NU DAAROM,

Ik, ROBERT GEORGE KEKEWICH, Lieutenant-Colonel Bevel-hebber Griqualand West en Bechuanaland, maak het hiermede bekend, dat indien zulke Proklamaties uitgevaardigd zijn geweest, dat zij van geene waarde zijn, en verânderen niet op eenige opzicht, de status van Britsche onderdanen, in de voorgezegde Britsche grondgebieden van Griqualand West en Bechuanaland, en indien eenige Britsche onderdaan gevonden is, de vyanden van Harer Majesteit door woord, daad, op of eenige wyze hulp te geven, zulke persoon zal als eenen gemeene rebel gehandeld worden, en zal op eens, als zulks, gestraft worden.

Gegeven onder mijne handteekening te Leger Hoofdkwartiers, Kimberley, op dezen twintigsten dag van October, in het jaar van onzen heer, 1899.

GOD BEHOEDE DE KONINGIN!

R. G. KEKEWICH,
LIEUTENANT-COLONEL,
Bevel Hebber Griqualand West en Bechuanaland.

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PROCLAMATION BY COLONEL KEKEWICH.

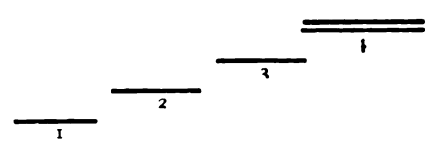
strength to hold a rifle or to train a gun—determination to fight to the last gasp.

The British losses had occurred, not in the assault itself, but after the raising of the white flag by the Boers. When the symbol of surrender was hoisted a party of the Kimberley Light Horse, of "D" Company, went forward to take the prisoners, and were at once fired on. Three men fell—Captain Maloney, Sergeant Mayston and Trooper John Peiser. A non-commissioned officer named Oakley stooped down to speak to Peiser, and immediately another volley was fired. The wounded trooper received a second wound—this time fatal—and Oakley was also wounded severely. Perhaps the saddest of all the sad cases that day was the death of young Peiser. He was but a lad of seventeen, a Colonial born, a first-rate rider and shot, and a notable athlete. He was one of the first to join the Light Horse, and was ever ready to volunteer for dangerous or arduous duties. He perished ere his boyhood had passed; but he had in his brief life done a man's work for the Empire. All Kimberley had loved the bright brave youth in his life, and it will be long ere his memory dies.

The rumour that a large British force was advancing to the relief of the town had been growing for several weeks. On the 28th of November the rumour became a certainty; and all that day the Kimberley folk watched for the coming of Methuen. It was a day memorable in the history of the siege: never to be forgotten by the brave men who manned the great mounds of diamond-earth, by the anxious women who had by this time come to be apprehensive for the safety of their dear ones.

Kekewich knew that Methuen was to attempt the passage of the Modder that day; and by way of helping him, and of harassing the besiegers, and of completing the rout that he expected to befall Cronje, he resolved on another sortie—a sortie in greater force than ever before: an attack on the enemy that would seal the fate of the western army of the Boers. With Methuen in front, and the Kimberley garrison in rear, how could the Dutchmen fail to be ground to powder?

Once more Scott-Turner, tireless even for a Scot and a Royal Highlander, was sent to lead the attack; and the force at his disposal consisted of the Diamond Fields Light Horse, most of the Loyal Lancashires, the Kimberley regiment, and a battery of 6 seven-pounder guns under Chamier of the Royal Artillery. The force set out at daybreak towards the west of the town, where the enemy was entrenched in a series of ridges from Wright's Farm on the right to Otto's kopje on the left. The Kimberley Regiment and the Lancashires, with the Artillery, made for a stony ridge known as Johnson's kopje, whence they could shell the Boer positions, and Scott-Turner himself, with the Diamond Fields Horse, moved on to Carter's Farm—the place of the sortie on the 25th. The Carter's Farm position was found deserted, and the Colonials pressed on towards a ridge where the Boers had a very strong position of four redoubts, built like this:—



These redoubts were of great strength, especially the fourth and hindmost one, which was of earth, capped with a wall of thick stones, and plenteously loopholed. To rush this position was Scott-Turner's idea. That it was strong, he knew: that

his hardy boys could capture it he did not doubt. So leading them over the ridge forming the position known as Carter's Farm, and a little way along the valley between it and the next Boer fortress, he gave the word, "Dismount!" In a moment the hardy Colonials were standing on the veldt; the horses were picketed, and the troopers spread themselves out in skirmishing order. It should be mentioned that there was a squadron of Cape Police with the Light Horse, and their services were of the utmost value.

In the valley there was a Boer laager or camp, and the first thing to be done was to rush this. The Cape Police and "G" Company of the Diamond Fields Light Horse were sent, and they made no mistake. They knew the art of taking cover, of crawling for a few hundred yards behind a slight rise in the ground, of taking advantage of every ant-heap and stone, and they moved to the attack in a style that must have extorted the high admiration of the Boers themselves.

Creeping, rushing, firing, crawling, the hardy troopers sped surely and stealthily on towards their prey. Bullets fly from laager and redoubt, but no man is hit. An object lesson, Mr. Atkins, for you. Had a battalion of regular infantry been attacking that laager there would have been half a dozen graves to be digged in the morning, and some surgical cases for the doctor to boot. But these Colonial irregulars did it without a casualty. Common sense, Mr. Atkins! That is what did it. Just common sense. Merely the taking of such cover as there happened to be. It was not so inspiring, maybe, as your blood-thrilling, tearing, swearing, pipe-and-bugle charge in line, loose or close-ordered; but it was very effective workmanship, and cost little.

What is it makes Mr. Atkins disdain cover when he goes to war? Is it stupidity, think you? Not a bit of it. He knows full well the advantages of cover. But he is a proud man. And when his blood is up—not the blood of a common soldier merely, of a man who talks, in peace time, as other men in his position—but the blood of a man, lineal successor of heroes who have planted his regiment's colours in every clime and in every continent for two hundred years—when his blood is up, the "gentleman in khaki" walks into or runs at his foe like a bull at a gate. Afraid of a blanky dashed Dutchman! Let me get at him! And he goes for his enemy in a style that makes you love him for a Briton and a brother. But it is not business.

Now your Colonial irregular, though a thorough Briton also, was more guarded in his methods as a rule. He was there, not for glory so much as for the wiping out of the foe at the least possible expense.

Wherefore the Cape Policemen and "G" Company D.F.L.H. stuck well to cover, and let their rifles do the shouting, until they had crept up to within fifty yards of the laager. Then they poured in a fire, hot, strong, and concentrated, until no Boer dared to show so much as the tip of his finger. After that a rush with bayonets fixed—a rush the Dutchmen did not stay to face; for they mounted their ponies and fled to the shelter of the redoubts beyond, pursued by more volleys. Great was the glee of the captors of the laager. They had made prize of a large quantity of provisions—ultimately most of these had to be destroyed because they could not be transported into the city—a waggon and fourteen draught oxen, 149 9-pounder shells, six kegs of gun-

powder, much saddlery, a large quantity of camp equipment, and one solitary horse.

A small party of the D.F.L.H., under Captain Shackleton, was left to hold the laager, and the rest of the party joined the main body.

LOOT FOR THE COLONIALS.

Meantime Scott-Turner had led his men to within 1,800 yards of the first redoubt without loss of any kind. The Highlander was a fine captain. He had that "eye for country" so necessary in an infantry commander in these days of magazine rifles. He could tell in a moment the right route to lead his men so as to make inequalities in the ground afford them protection—a kind of skill almost instinctive amongst the Boers, but rarely found elsewhere. The Black Watch man had it, however, and his men felt the benefit of his leadership.

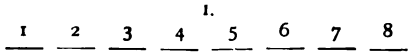
Now came the real fighting. "Lie down!" And in a moment the whole assaulting force vanishes from the view

of the Boers in the redoubt. For every man has taken cover beautifully, as to the manner born. "At eighteen hundred!" And rifles are loaded and sights fixed. "Independent! Commence!" The section commanders pass the word along. The Mausers in the redoubt have been blazing away for an hour. From this moment the combat ceases to be what the Irishman called a "one-man duel"; and the quick, short snap of the cordite answers the terrier-bark of the melinite.

The battery of 7-pounders has now come into action, and bravely shells the ridge opposite, taking little heed of the heavier metal of the Boer guns. And the enterprising lieutenant of the Lancashires, Webster, now known as "the stoker," has come out with one of his pet armoured trains. He does not in the least expect to do any damage — he cannot get near enough—but he hopes to tempt the Boers to fire at him! They gratify his wish. The little snorting steam-engine seems to annoy the Dutchmen greatly, for they turn half their guns on it. Webster is delighted beyond measure. While they are devoting their attention to him they are leaving Scott-Turner and Chamier alone; and, for all Webster cares, they may fling shells at him and his armoured train from now until the Day of Judgment—provided, that is, that Webster has plenty of fuel on board—for he is just about the most expert shell-dodger in the British army. He has had a great deal of practice by this time, and has learnt all there is to know on the subject. And he keeps "backing and filling," as the sailors have it—going now up the line, now down, then standing still. Then, with a snort of defiance, darting off just as the Boer gunners have trained their guns on him, laughing all the while, this subaltern of the Lancashires, at Major Albrecht and his cosmopolitan "ammertoor" artillerymen.

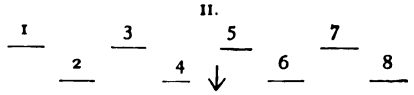
The attacking force under the tireless major adopted tactics of the boldest after they had reached the 1,800 yards mark. They were instructed to advance in half-sectional rushes of fifty yards, covered by rifle-fire and the shrapnel of the battery. This means that a half-section (half of a half-company or squadron) would make a kind of creeping run in loose, open order for fifty yards, then lie down behind cover and fire away while the other section rushed up level with them—the line thus advancing half at a time. If you look at this sketch you will see what is meant:—

I.



Whole squadron, divided into eight sections, in line.

II.



The sections 2, 4, 6, and 8 have rushed forward, leaving the even numbers to fire between them, and so cover their advance.

As soon as each man arrives behind cover he begins to fire, and when all the odd-numbered sections are firing, the even numbers cease fire, start up, and run to fill up the spaces. In this way the Kimberley men drew nearer and nearer to the enemy, much to their own satisfaction, for they longed to try a British charge upon them—especially the Lancashires, who swore they were getting stiff for want of a little bayonet exercise.

Soon they were to have it. For the rushes, beautifully timed and fearlessly executed—and covered by close and deadly rifle-firing—soon brought the whole line within about fifty yards of the first Boer redoubt. There had been some loss during

the passage. The Boers from their fortification had kept up a hot fire on the advance, a fire that would have been hotter and more deadly but for the splendid shooting of the Kimberley men.

Now hearts beat high with the throb of battle. The pride of race, the fierce joy of coming to handgrips with the hated foeman brought the blood to sunburnt cheeks, and brown hands clutched nervously on the stocks of rifles. Not that they feared the Dutchmen. It was rather the nervousness of men who felt themselves called upon to uphold their country's name and were fearful of being found unworthy.

They crept and crawled and dragged themselves along, still firing as they went, yard by yard nearer to the redoubt. When would the word——? "Charge!" It is the trumpet voice of their leader. "Charge!" shout the captains. "Charge!" yell the sergeants. The bugler of the Lancashires blows brazenly. The men see red. With one full-throated shout they spring up and leap at the entrenchment. This is a British charge: the charge that chased the Old Guard from Saint Jean over the ploughed fields: the charge that cleared the mountain of Fuentes D'Onoro: the charge that drove the Muscovite from Alma's heights. God forbid that Britain's sons, wherever they may be, should lose the trick of it, for it is their birthright and inheritance.

Not many of the Boers remained to contest the position. Those who did rued the day. The rest, with more caution, retired firing, and occupied the second redoubt. From this also they were driven; and from the third. At bayonet's point, but not fightless. It could not be denied that these Dutchmen fought well, according to their lights; and they held the second and third positions for a good half-hour, at much cost to Scott-Turner's men.

And even when they were turned out of the third redoubt the task of the sortie-party was only just beginning. For at pistol-shot distance in the rear there rose the great Boer bulwark, the fourth redoubt, constructed with a care and a skill admirable indeed. It was, in fact, almost impregnable to an infantry attack. With the aid of artillery an assault upon it would have been but half as hard a task, though even then sufficiently difficult. And here our men could have no aid from artillery, because shells would have to be thrown over the heads of the assaulters—a ticklish business, and not to be so much as attempted unless there is considerable margin of space.

The troops pressed forward to the attack, crawling and wriggling along the ground, and firing whenever a Boer showed above the parapet. So deadly was the British fire that ere long no Boer dared to exhibit even half an inch of himself to view. The time had come. Once more the voices peal out, "Charge!" Once more the bugler blows the inspiring note. Straight at the wall the men of Kimberley dash. At the "double" the handful of Loyal Lancashires springs to the assault. But the redoubt suddenly comes to life again. It is quick with rifles. Our men are so close they can see the whites of their enemies' eyes. And a deadly discharge stops the assault for the time. "Retire!" And once more the British load and fire from the cover of boulder and hillock.

Meanwhile the little force in the captured laager is hard pressed. Boers have crept up to them by twos and threes, and are now lying all round the laager, firing and attempting to advance for a rush. The

odds are enormous, but "G" Company of the D.F.L.H. is quite able to take care of itself. There is good cover, and—what is that? Ammunition running short? Something must be done. See, the Boers are coming up in force. It will be quite hard enough to keep them out anyway; but without cartridges——! What is to be done? The little force is isolated, and anybody who tries to get back to the supports will be shot—at least, the chances of it are about a hundred to one

Nevertheless, with the necessity comes the man. Sergeant Spalding volunteers to run the gauntlet. He proposes to mount the captured horse and "make her go," as he calls it, "like thunder," trusting to speed and the suddenness of his dash to disconcert the Boers' aim. Off he goes. "Like thunder," as he said; it is more like lightning. Surely no Boer pony ever travelled at such a rate before, nor ever had its sides so galled by spurring. How the sergeant escaped is one of war's mysteries; but he did escape; and presently returned, bringing with him twenty of the Lancashires, under a sergeant; and, what was even more welcome, plenty of cartridges. That daring ride saved the laager. Never again that day were the Boers within measurable distance of its recapture; and after several hours' fighting they were glad enough to withdraw out of range.

The main battle raged fiercely under the noontide sun. Sweltering men threw lead out of rifles almost red-hot. The British held the three redoubts still; and still the stubborn Dutchmen clung to the fourth. The range was short, the men—for the most part—fair shots, and the result was that neither party dared to show above the trenches. If anything, the Kimberley men had the best of the rifle duel. At last the British leader resolved to put forth another effort, and he called to his men to follow him. Readily they responded; and once more hurled themselves in vain against the stone rampart of the fourth redoubt. Again it was "Retire!" and, leaving some wounded and some dead on the ground, the baffled stormers retreated to the three positions they had won.

Here again the rifle duel was renewed. The grimness of it was positively fascinating. Men watched for each other. A Kimberley Light Horse private was only saved from death by the Boer bullet touching the muzzle of his rifle and glancing off. Three Cape Police men, showing themselves for a moment to shoot, were killed, with bullets through the head, all at the same instant. With more caution the rest fought on.

Hour succeeded hour. Again Scott-Turner called upon his men for a charge, and again they responded with magnificent courage and spirit. But their valour was wasted against the stone wall of the redoubt, and many fell. Young Clifford, a typical "orficer boy," in command of the Lancashire Mounted Infantry, had an escape about as narrow as any escape could be. A Martini bullet hit him, knocked off his hat, and ploughed a neat furrow the whole length of his scalp. The hair was taken off, the skin was singed, and that was all; and the lucky lieutenant continued to lead his loyal lads. Scott-Turner was less fortunate. A heavy Martini bullet struck his shoulder and penetrated the fleshy part. But he, too, fought on.

It was growing dusk, and the fourth redoubt was still intact. It became obvious that twice the force in hand was necessary to carry the position by assault; and so

the commander made up his mind to retire on Kimberley. But he had no time to give the order. A grey-bearded Boer, bearing a sporting express rifle, saw the towering form of the lion-hearted Scotsman. A quick, careful aim, a touch of the trigger, and Scott-Turner fell to rise no more. An explosive bullet had struck him in the head, blowing it to pieces.

For a time all was confusion in the British ranks. The force had lost its leader, and many precious minutes passed ere the officer who now succeeded to the command could get the men in hand. This officer was Major Peakman, of the Kimberley Light Horse, a civilian who had flung himself into the work of soldiering with a zeal and energy worthy of his nation. Upon him was now cast the heavy duty of leading the party into safety. But before he could issue orders for retirement, further misfortune befell; for Lieutenant Wright, of the Kimberley Light Horse, who had been one of the foremost when work was to be done, dropped, also shot through the head.

It was plain now that the attack on the fourth redoubt must be abandoned; and Peakman gave the necessary orders. The force retired without confusion, bearing their dead with them and their wounded. The Boers followed up; but were kept at bay by the force retiring as it had advanced, in alternate half sections and taking advantage of cover; and so the laager was reached. The waggons and oxen captured here now became useful for carrying the dead and wounded, and the whole force retired on the Carter's Farm position. This they easily held until the Boers were glad to leave them unmolested; and at 2 a.m. on the 29th they returned to camp.

The sortie had been a bold one, alike in design and execution. The loss inflicted on the Boers was not less than one hundred, all told, besides the destruction of the laager and the capture of some stores and ammunition. But the price had been heavy—all too heavy for the slender garrison to pay. Twenty-two men were killed, mostly Kimberley volunteers; and twenty-eight wounded, of whom eight subsequently died of their injuries.

For what comfort it might be to their relatives and comrades, the slain were accorded the honours of an impressive military funeral. The band of the Lancashires played solemn music, the men of that regiment marched with arms reversed. Scott-Turner's charger was led behind his master's coffin, according to the usage that has survived from days of chivalry. All the officers of the garrison, the civic dignitaries of Kimberley, representatives of the churches, all were there; and the population of Kimberley gazed at the sad procession, not all dry-eyed.

"I counted twenty-two coffins at the cemetery," writes one Scotsman on the 1st December, "and at least six have since died. . . . The killed are mostly Kimberley boys, and leave mothers and wives. It was heartrending to see the women identifying the bodies." Poor mothers! Poor wives! They had given the loved ones to the great cause; with their blood to cement the fabric of Empire, to water freely the trees of Peace and Prosperity in South Africa. So the women mourned the death of their men-folk, but gloried in the manner of it. And black was the common colour in Kimberley for many a weary month.

But the greatest blow of all to the garrison was the untimely killing of Scott-Turner. This officer was one of the type of soldier whom Britons delight to honour.

DAWN IN THE TRENCHES.

He was no novice in South African warfare, and no stranger to the country. In 1893, though only a subaltern, he was sent to Matabeleland in charge of a detachment of the Black Watch, and took part in the first Matabele war. At the end of the campaign he accepted a civil appointment as Civil Commissioner and Resident Magistrate at Umtali, where he impressed both Europeans and natives by the sense of his fairness and his firmness. Above all, he possessed that rarest quality—tact. While he was on leave of absence in Cape Town, in 1895, the second Matabele war broke out, and Turner volunteered for service. Colonel Plumer was raising a force to proceed to the relief of Buluwayo, at that time besieged by the Matabele, and Lieutenant Scott-Turner was given the adjutancy of the Relief Force, with the local rank of captain. In the famous march from Mafeking to Buluwayo, in the battles and skirmishes with the rebel tribesmen, the young Scotsman proved himself a capable officer and a brave soldier. The rising subdued, he resumed his work at Umtali, and there remained until 1898, when he threw up his appointment in order to rejoin his old regiment with a brevet-majority.

By this time the storm-clouds were gathering. And, in order to be on the spot if trouble should arise, Scott-Turner obtained three months' leave of absence from the War Office. But before the three months had expired the military authorities had become uneasy, and the major was sent to Kimberley to look about him. Here he was joined by Major O'Meara and Lieutenant McInnes of the Royal Engineers, and these three surveyed the surrounding country and made plans for the defence of the Diamond City.

With a few heavy guns they could have made it impregnable. But the Cape Government of the day declined to sanction the making of any warlike preparations—even defensive ones—and the plans remained on paper only. Colonel Kekewich arrived on September 13th, and took over the command, appointing Scott-Turner his chief staff-officer ; and when war broke out the commander placed his energetic subordinate in command of the mounted troops. The rest has been told. How he led sortie and reconnaissance, never letting the enemy rest, never letting him draw too close to the town. How at last he fell in honour. He was young to die —but how can man die better?

During all that day of the 29th of November the garrison of Kimberley could hear in the south the sound of Methuen's naval guns, but they knew not how the battle had gone. Next day Colonel Kekewich learned that Methuen had crossed the Modder, but when the final stroke for the deliverance of the town was to be made, he knew not. All Kimberley knew that a British force was almost within hailing distance, for the flash of Methuen's signal lights could be seen nightly. And the townsfolk could not understand why tarried the chariots so long. Their own experience of the Boers was that the Dutchmen were no great warriors. They forgot that against them the invaders fought on the offensive—against the Relief Column they were on the defensive and in positions of their own choosing.

There was no doubt at all in the minds of the valiant defenders of Kimberley that if there had been plenty of artillery in the town the garrison could have sallied out and beaten the Boers unaided. But artillery was Kimberley's weakest point. "For all the good the guns in Kimberley are," wrote our Town Guardsman on the 1st of

December, "we might just as well have pea-shooters." He had reason to be bitterly sarcastic; and he adds, "It is a good job for us they are such cowards, as they might shell us out in a week."

Herein our Scotsman did the Boers some injustice. They were not cowards. A Briton calls a Frenchman a coward because the Frenchman, if punched with fist, will (there being no lethal weapon to hand) probably scratch and kick his assailant. The Frenchman, on the other hand, calls the Briton a coward because the thick-headed Islander declines to engage in combats with duelling swords. And the British of Kimberley called the Boers cowards because the besiegers would not come near enough to hit—and be hit.

A HIGHLANDER WITH A HELIOGRAPH.

Meanwhile Labram, engineer of genius, with the aid of his book on gun-construction and the assistance of his bright brain, had nearly completed the drawings and designs for a pea-shooter of quite another calibre; and the workers in metal, who in peace time made and mended—chiefly mended—the mining machinery of De Beers, were putting their hands and brains into the making of castings of an unusual sort. Of which more later.

There was no move in Kimberley until the 9th of December, when Major Chamier reconnoitred to Otto's kopje with two guns and a handful of mounted troops. He saw no one, but somebody saw him and greeted him with many discharges of musketry. So perfectly had the Boers concealed themselves, however, that Chamier could not discover them; so, fearful of walking into a trap, he turned to the right-about and made for home, first dropping a couple of shells into some scrub where he thought the enemy must be.

On the 11th (December) the roar of guns was again heard to the south. It never occurred to the Colonists that a British army could be defeated by Boers. And, incredible as it may seem, the people of Kimberley never knew, until two months or more after the event, of the disaster and slaughter at Magersfontein. Colonel Kekewich knew, but he did not tell anybody—not even the Right Honourable Cecil John Rhodes. Whereat the said Cecil John chose to be wrath.

The only complaint the "influential" civilians had to make against their protector was this reticence of his. They wanted to know how things were going on outside, what the prospects of relief were, and all the rest of the news. But when the commanding officer of the Loyal Lancashires wanted a secret to be kept—well, he kept it himself.

He knew that there was in the town a

very considerable disloyal population ; and he was not going to let out anything that would or might create alarm or give a handle to the disloyal to foster discontent. Moreover, he had very strong ideas as to the duty of the garrison ; and he absolutely declined to allow messages to be sent out of Kimberley which might give the impression that the town was seriously in danger. Whereat once more the Right Honourable Cecil John Rhodes—not to mention some newspaper correspondents—chose to be angry. For Mr. Rhodes had at stake in and about the town of Kimberley a great many millions of money. The siege was costing his Company about £10,000 per week ; and in the nature of things he could not but view with alarm and dismay the prospect of an indefinite prolongation of the siege.

Not that Cecil Rhodes was a mere vulgar millionaire. Far from it. He valued money, not as a means of buying race-horses and houses in Park Lane and such-like extravagances, but as a means of carrying out certain gigantic schemes of his : a railway from Cairo to the Cape ; a telegraph wire from one end of Africa to the other ; and, doubtless, other schemes of equal magnitude. Moreover, to give him his due, he spent his money in the defence of Kimberley with a lavish hand, and secured the performance of much work willingly that might have had to be obtained compulsorily.

Still, he sometimes forgot that it was not he, but Lieutenant-Colonel Kekewich, of her Majesty's Army, who was in command of the garrison of Kimberley and responsible to the Empire and his august Mistress for the safety of the Diamond City. And once the colonel of the Lancashires had to put his foot down. For in a beleaguered town, as on a ship at sea, there can be only one authority.

To show the state of knowledge—or, rather, ignorance—of the townspeople as to the efforts that were being made on their behalf by the Relief Column, let another line or two be cited from a letter by the beleaguered Scotsman aforesaid :—"We do not know half as much as you do about the big fight at Modder River"—(*i.e.* Magersfontein)—"*but I think the Boers are pretty well surrounded.*" The italics are ours.

And in this happy frame of mind were most of the garrison, what time my Lord Methuen was lying shattered and powerless within a day's march of them. "The Boers pretty well surrounded!" Yes, indeed! Surrounded by earthworks, and redoubts, and barbed-wire entanglements.

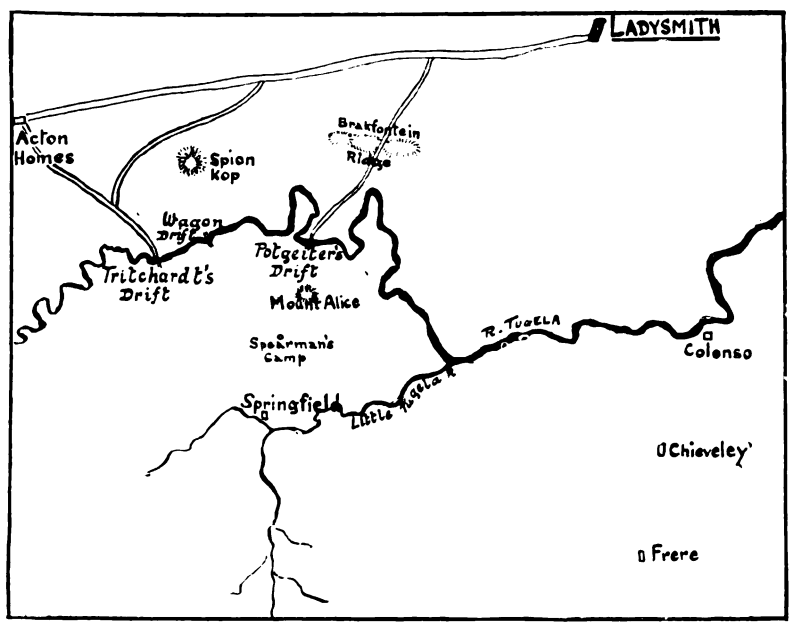
But the Town Guard of Kimberley did not know this, and were happy in their blissful ignorance, their childlike faith in the invincibility of the British soldier, the superior tactics of the British officer. One imagines they judged them all by the standard of Robert George Kekewich.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

BULLER MOVES AGAIN.

NOW Buller's plan of operations on his second attempt to get through to the relief of Ladysmith was far different from his first plan. The first was a bull-dog attempt to take the enemy by the throat and shake the life out of him, which was well enough if you could get sufficiently near to spring at the said throat. The second had in it more of complicated strategy; and to understand it one must take a short survey of the country round the Tugela.

From Colenso, on Buller's left hand, the Tugela runs from east to west, with but few serpentine wrigglings—few, that is, for the Tugela, which is one of the most winding streams to be found anywhere. This east-to-west course is observed for something like eight or nine miles, up to a point where a tributary, called the Little Tugela, falls into the main stream.



The Little Tugela runs slightly from the south—that is, about south-east-by-east—for three miles to a place called Springfield, where is a road-bridge and a drift. The Tugela itself wanders from the point of junction in a northerly direction, with many twistings and turnings, gradually working itself into an east-and-west course again. Roughly, and for the present purpose, the above sketch will explain the situation.

On the north bank of the Tugela proper the Boers had their main positions, though they had been in general possession of the country between the Tugela and the Little Tugela; and they had strongly fortified the hills commanding every single road. Their main position on their right was a hill known as Spion Kop, which overlooked Trichardt's Drift and the roads from it to Ladysmith. They had also fortified in strength a high and rocky series of hills called Brakfontein Ridge, north of Potgeiter's Drift, and commanding the road from that ford to Ladysmith.

Buller's plan was to send a strong body of troops, consisting of all his force except Barton's brigade, to seize Springfield. Thence proceed two roads, running respectively to Trichardt's Drift and Potgeiter's Drift on the Tugela. The cavalry brigade was to hurry on to Potgeiter's and seize the drift there, to be followed and supported by a brigade of infantry. When the infantry arrived they were to hold Potgeiter's, leaving the cavalry free to operate in advance of Warren. Meantime Warren was to take the left-hand road from Springfield, march on Trichardt's Drift with all his strength, cross the Tugela there, and advance along a road running north. About a mile and a half north of the Tugela this road branches into two—one, to the left, continuing right along to Acton Homes in a north and slightly westerly direction, the other bending to the right round the immediate rear of Spion Kop.

This method of making a feint attack (*i.e.* Buller's at Potgeiter's) to cover the real or main attack (*i.e.* Warren's on the far British left) is the recognised method of manœuvring to pass an obstacle such as a river. In the campaigns of Wellington in the Peninsula and Napoleon in Italy you invariably find this method adopted.

Warren's orders were to take the left-hand road and proceed to Acton Homes, declining battle with his right—that is, refusing to assault Spion Kop and the positions round about it. Arrived at Acton Homes—which is almost due west of Ladysmith—he was to swing round his column and come back to an open plain north of Spion Kop, and ultimately reach a road which runs from Potgeiter's Drift to Ladysmith over Brakfontein Ridge. The brigade at Potgeiter's would co-operate by keeping engaged the forces at Brakfontein, and by making a feint attack on the east side of the Spion Kop position if possible.

Having gained the open plain aforesaid, in the rear of Spion Kop, the position of the forces would be, roughly, this:—The Boers would have a very large British force threatening the rear of their right, a small one holding their right front, and a small one holding their centre at Colenso. They must either abandon the Spion Kop and Brakfontein positions, in which case there would be a clear road across fairly open country into Ladysmith, or they must stand and fight where they were exposed to attack from front and rear. Strategically, if Warren once gained the open ground in rear of Spion Kop, Botha's position became absolutely untenable. On this everybody is agreed.

Now you will observe, and we have already said, that there were two ways from Trichardt's Drift to that open ground. The first was by the left-hand road up to Acton Homes (about seven miles distant from Trichardt's Drift), then a sharp turn to the right, a march of about another seven miles in the direction west to east; and then, if the Boers still held to their positions, another march of about three

miles to the attack in the direction north to south. If the Boers did not hold to their positions, the advance from west to south would be continued into Ladysmith —about sixteen miles from Acton Homes.

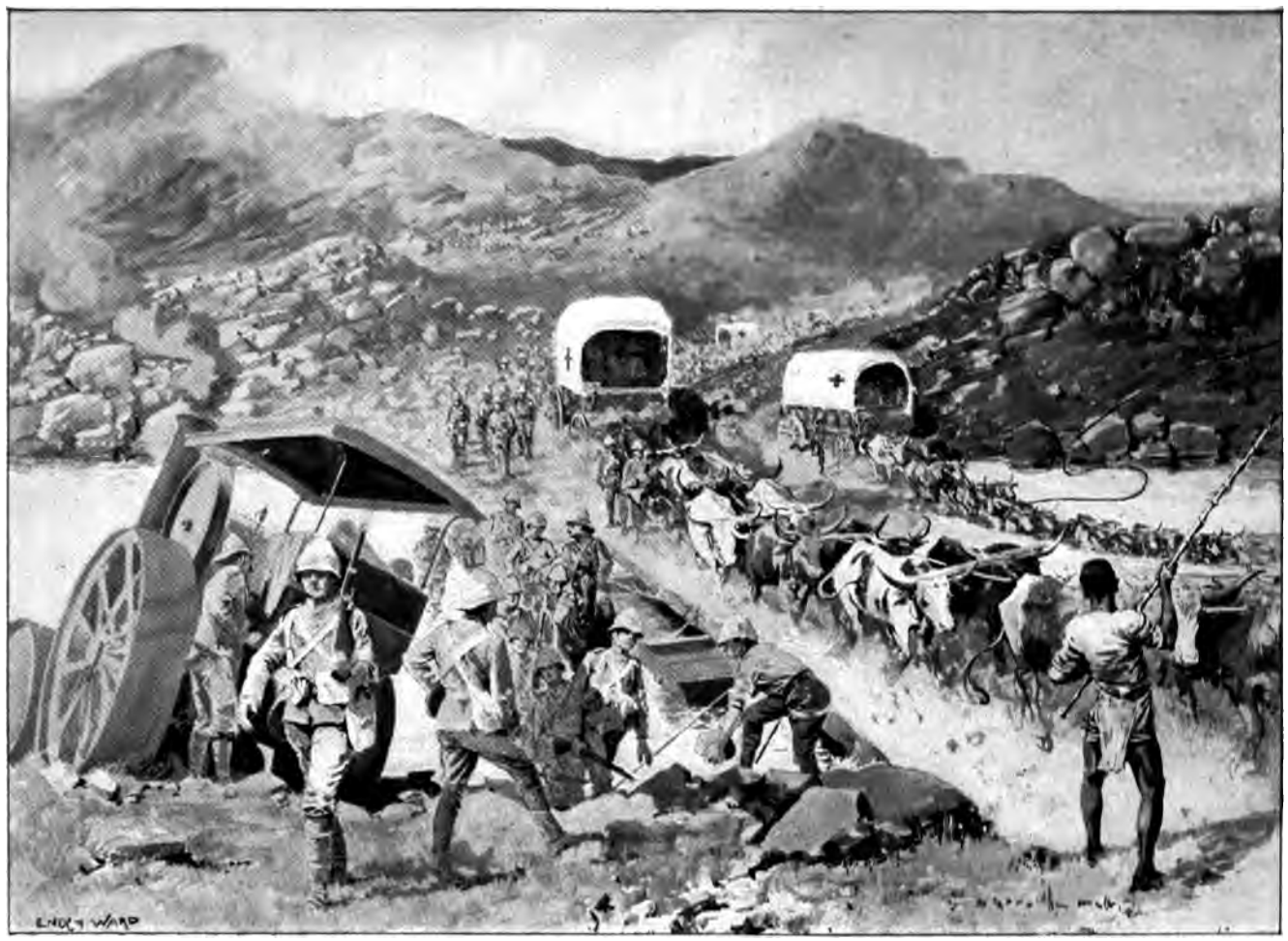
The second, or right-hand road, would cut off a huge corner—would reduce the route from the drift to Ladysmith by nearly one-half; being, in effect, the covering of one side of a triangle instead of the other two. So far it was an advantageous road to follow, but it would present this great difficulty, that to follow it would necessarily entail one or more pitched battles. For a column passing along by this route would have to pass within 2,000 yards of Spion Kop, whence the Boers could enfilade it as it passed at their leisure. And as, of course, such an enfilading could not be permitted, because it would have wrecked the whole column, the British must, of the direst necessity, take and hold Spion Kop.

No one doubted their ability to do both things. But the mountain was a very difficult one, and to storm it would be a most expensive operation. Once taken, it appeared to be the key of the Boer right, and its capture would probably mean an assured success and a speedy relief of the beleaguered town; but it was very doubtful whether the capture of the mountain would not entail the loss of more time—not to speak of more life—than the journey by the longer route would occupy. For these reasons Sir Redvers Buller, while he necessarily left a great deal to Sir Charles Warren's discretion, strongly recommended him to proceed *viâ* Acton Homes. Indeed, the whole plan was based on the understanding that the relief column would take that road. We have insisted at some length upon these details, because without a proper understanding of them the reader would be very much at sea on the account of the actual operations, and an injustice might be done to persons not deserving of blame.

Let us now proceed to consider those operations—movements which extended over a period from the 11th of January to the 27th, which brought forth many gallant feats of arms, many instances of heroic endurance; which were marked alike by brilliance and by blunders, which conclusively proved, if proof did not exist before, the difficulty of conquering a hardy, obstinate race like the Boers of South Africa; and which marked the commencement of a Titanic struggle devastating in its fury, heroic in its stubbornness, creditable alike to victors and to vanquished: a struggle the like of which was unknown in our age and generation. For from that moment the hill-country between Ladysmith town and the Tugela River became one great battlefield, to be won and lost inch by inch.

It was at dawn of day on the 10th of January that Lord Dundonald set out from Chieveley Camp, and at the same moment Sir Charles Warren, with the force already enumerated, departed from Frere. Each force had the same objective—Springfield on the Little Tugela, and each was full of the highest spirits. It was necessary to make a pounce, so as to seize Springfield and the drift at Potgeiter's. In order to give the Boers no more notice than was necessary, the naval guns remained for the time at Chieveley, firing away at the trenches north of Colenso, as though there were no new game afoot. And meanwhile the sailors manufactured dummy cannon to be left in position when the genuine articles should be required elsewhere.

Warren could move only at a snail's pace,



"SOON THERE WAS A REGULAR BLOCK" (*p.* 459).

partly because his force was composed of infantry, and partly for that he was heavily encumbered with transport. He only took 3½ days' provisions with him, but there was food for another seventeen days ready packed in Frere, and waiting to be sent after him from time to time. But still he was heavily laden. To begin with, tents for all the men were carried—and canvas sufficient to hold about 19,000 men takes up a great deal of room and is heavy. Years ago the War Office never gave any heed to the sufferings of our soldiers, much less to their discomforts. It allowed them to sleep in the open in all climes and all weathers; to march without soles to their boots, as did the army of the Peninsula for many a hundred miles; to feed just as it happened. But public opinion stepped in, and now the authorities were "cumbered about much serving." It is an open question whether the result of the public agitation, though undoubtedly advantageous to the individual soldier, has not led the authorities rather too far in the other direction.

For a column engaged in an opera tion in which rapidity of movement was advisable, if not absolutely essential to success, Warren's force was loaded with stores and supplies to an extent almost incredible. His traction engines, his mule-drawn ammunition waggons, his water carts, his teams of oxen, covered some seven miles of road. In all, there were nearly 5,000 vehicles of one sort and another; and when it is remembered tl at the pace of the column must be that of its slowest part (in this case the oxen), it will readily be imagined that progress was, to say the least, not rapid. The distance from Frere to Springfield was only about sixteen miles — no more than a march of a day.

On the night of the 10th Warren pitched his camp at a point only some six or seven miles from Frere, at a spot where was a spruit. So marched not First Consul. So marched not the Iron Duke. So marched not the hero of Kandahar.

The order of the march was this, the 5th (Hart's Irish) Brigade—consisting of the 1st Connaught Rangers, the 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers, the 1st Inniskillings, and the 1st (English) Border Regiment—who were brigaded with their Hibernian comrades so long that one of the men declared they all spoke with the brogue—were first to take the road. The three battalions of Irishmen, pleased and proud to march first, sang as they stepped out; and the stalwart men of the dales and fells swaggered along quite as cheerfully, though with less of outward mirth. They made a gay procession.

Hard on their heels came the 2nd (Hildyard's English) Brigade, who had been, as has been explained, encamped at Chieveley. They were the 2nd Battalion of the Devons, the West Yorks, the Queen's West Surreys, and the East Surreys.

Then followed Warren's Division proper, whose composition has been described to you.

The miseries and encumbrance of his enormous transport were soon felt, for at the distance of about six miles a spruit had to be crossed. There was no bridge, but there was a drift, and across this drift over 400 wagons had to be taken. As the case invariably is in South Africa, the banks of the stream were high and steep, and although they had been cut away and sloped somewhat so as to make a gradual run down to the river and up from it, yet the slope was still steep. Imagine the state of the banks after a few score ox-waggons had crossed! They had become a

muddy, slippery, inclined plane, down which the vehicles skidded at an alarming rate. And the water was up to a man's middle.

A bridge was extemporised for the infantry by running several ox-waggons into the water and placing planks across them, so that the men passed over dry-foot ; all except a few, that is, who came last and had to balance themselves on planks made slippery by the muddy boots of their predecessors. These took a bath, to their own great disgust and the undisguised amusement of their more fortunate comrades. The road was such that waggons could only march in single line, and had to cross the drift one at a time. There were the inevitable vehicles that stuck in the mud, and had to be hauled out either by teams drawn from other waggons or by the traction engines. For Warren had these ugly machines with him ; and, to their credit be it said, they proved the most successful and the speediest part of all the traction at his disposal. They marked a new era in the transport service—the era of mechanical power for cross-country haulage, and we may and probably shall see the day when ox-transport and mule-transport and horse-transport are abolished in favour of steam or electric transport. One of the drawbacks of a traction engine is that you cannot eat it, however hungry you may be.

No very great stretch of imagination is required to enable the reader to perceive the state in which the column speedily found itself. Soon there was a regular block. Transport guards, wearied to death, threw themselves down and slept for hours what time their charges stood there, the oxen, mild-eyed and patient, the Kaffir drivers impatient and cursing in strange tongues, the Army Service Corps nearly at its wit's end, the Staff almost delirious, the soldiers, eager to march on and do something, uttering sulphurous comments in their best barrack-room manner. But impatience, attempts to hurry, only made confusion ten times worse confounded. Steady effort was the only way. And at last, late at night, after about half a day's toiling and moiling, the waggons were all across the drift and the army camped for the night. The distance covered was, as has been said, ridiculously little, but the men were as tired as if they had been forced-marching for a week. For most of them had been splashing in to the help of the transport service, and sometimes had simply to lift both waggons and beasts out of the mire.

Fortunately, my Lord Dundonald had been somewhat more expeditious. On the 10th, early in the morning, he set out from Chieveley, acting at first as escort to the baggage convoy, but about one-fourth of the way to Springfield the mounted troops pushed on ahead. They left the Dragoons behind at Pretorius's Farm, and the rest of the force, in wide-scattered order, trotted on to Springfield. It was known that in the country between the Big and Little Tugelas the Boers had been fortifying the ground, but it was not known whether they had fortified the approaches to Springfield Bridge—the important position that Dundonald had come to seize. So scouts were sent forward, and these spread themselves out (they went singly) and examined the whole country up to the bridge—to return with the report that no Boers were in sight.

Dundonald promptly gave the word "Forward!" and the brown-clad horsemen trotted gaily to Springfield. They had won the first move. The bridge was examined and found intact. It had not been mined or otherwise tampered with, and did not appear to be commanded from

"THE BRITISH COVERING PARTY OPENED FIRE" (*p.* 460).

the other side. Messengers were despatched to Warren and to Buller instantly to tell them the bridge is ours.

My Lord Dundonald was a man of enterprise, as well as of dash and courage. He had, also, brains. He found the Little Tugela much swollen—eighty yards wide, in fact, and deep, running rapidly. He knew that the Boers had a horror of fighting when there was no safe way of retreat. He concluded that if the Little Tugela was so rampant, the Big River must be unfordable also. Hence it seemed worth while to look whether the enemy had all retired to the north of the Big Tugela. Intelligent men were plentiful. So he sent out single scouts, and scouts in pairs, and patrols, with orders to feel the country for miles around and ahead, and to bring back tidings of their search. Away they went, the S.A. Light Horse, Thorneycroft's, Bethune's men ; and that afternoon, while Warren's Division was floundering eight miles away in a drift, the irrepressible irregulars scoured the country between the Tugelas, Big and Little, with thoroughness.

They found fortifications in plenty. Kopjes with sangars and redoubts ; ridges with rifle-pits and trenches ; big-gun emplacements. Every sign of being in the enemy's country except one—Boers. It was as Dundonald had guessed ; the ever-cautious Boers had retired behind the main stream, fearful that if an attack were made upon them while the river was in flood they would be cut off, be destroyed, and lose their guns.

And as scout after scout returned with the same intelligence, my Lord Dundonald began to see daylight. He had been ordered to seize and hold Springfield Bridge. Not a word of anything else. Well, he had seized, and was holding it. Why not press forward and pounce on Potgeiter's Drift and Spearman's Hill? The scouts reported it unoccupied. Clearly the Boers were completely in the dark so far : had no idea of our jump to the left : no notion of our occupation of Springfield. Why not make the most of the time ere they begin to be enlightened? Once let the Dutchmen know we are on the move for Potgeiter's, and they will occupy Spearman's Hill themselves, and we shall have to storm it before we can use the drift.

The commander of the cavalry consulted with his officers. They unanimously approved of his design. The troopers were resting ; but on the "Boot and Saddle" they were soon on horseback again. To be on the move was their delight ; and they hoped vehemently that their leader would soon take them to within striking distance of their foe. Three hundred men and two guns were ordered to remain to guard the bridge at Springfield ; and the other 700, with four guns, pushed on hotfoot to Spearman's Hill—a distance of about nine miles. Notwithstanding the reports of the scouts, patrols were pushed out to protect the advance ; but the little column went on at its best pace, and that evening, without firing a shot, found themselves in possession of the heights commanding Potgeiter's Drift.

So much for enterprise. So much for the value of a mounted, mobile force. So much, above all, for common-sense. Now a messenger to General Buller, and another to Warren, asking him to send up supports of infantry. The mounted troops sleep that night the slumber of men who have earned a night's repose. But their pickets strain ears and eyes to hear and see ; and every man who lies down has his arms at his side.

Dundonald's messages announcing the success of his rapid movements put life into the infantry brigades ; and Lyttelton's Rifle (4th) Brigade, consisting of the 2nd Scottish Rifles, the 3rd King's Royal Rifles, the 1st Battalion Rifle Brigade, and the 1st Durham Light Infantry, is pushed forward to support him.

But ere the infantry arrived the daring spirits of the South African Light Horse have carried out a plan fraught with deadliest danger to themselves, whereby they earn great glory. As General Lord Dundonald had surmised, the Big Tugela was in flood, its turbulent waters filling the whole bed of the river, and rendering it a matter of impossibility to cross by the drift. But there was at Potgeiter's not only a ford, but a ferry ; the latter being used when the drift might be unfordable.

The ferry was worked by means of a boat with ropes. You may see the same thing on many rivers in Britain—a flat-bottomed punt, moved by an endless rope attached to each bank. The ferryman stands in the boat and turns a windlass, round which the cord winds itself.

Now when Dundonald looked down from Spearman's Hill into Potgeiter's, he saw that this boat, the only means of crossing the stream, was moored to the other bank. Clearly he must have that boat. So he called for volunteers. Who, for the honour of Britain, would swim those turbulent waters and capture the ferry ?

Volunteers were not lacking ; and out of those who offered the services were accepted of an officer and six men of the South African Light Horse, whose names deserve to be recorded. Here they are. Lieutenant Carlisle, Sergeant Barkley, and Troopers Cox, Turner, Howell, Collingwood and Godden. And this is what they did :—

They, with twenty other men of their own corps, who were to act as covering party—that is, to fire from our bank of the river upon any of the enemy who tried to interfere with the cutting-out party—made their way cannily down to the river bank. The enemy had not yet taken the alarm, and it was quite possible that the pont might be secured without discovery. The covering party lay down, with loaded rifles. The valiant Seven took off their superfluous clothing—and all clothing was superfluous in this undertaking — and, holding each a knife between his teeth, plunged into the torrent. It was a Herculean task. Imagine, you who swim, crossing the Thames at London Bridge when the Thames valley is flooded, and the water is boiling over Teddington Weir. Multiply the strength of the current many times, and you have something like the task of Carlisle and his six troopers.

Bravely they battle with the current. They are all splendid, strong swimmers, especially a man named Howell, who, by the transmigration theory must have been a wild duck in some former existence. A whisper comes across the waters : "I'm sinking !" It is Barkley, who, half way across, finds his limbs suddenly failing him. Howell makes for him, and guides him to the rope attached to the ferry-boat. Then the same man swims about, helping first one, then another. They all reach the north bank in safety, and find that it will be necessary for some of them to swim back, and haul the boat over by the rope. So they all plunge again into the stream except Carlisle, Barkley, and Cox. The other four again cross safely, and begin to haul at the hawser, the three who are left at north side getting into the boat.

"Jump! Quick!" It is the lieutenant who speaks. And as he speaks he him-

self springs overboard, followed by the other two. And luckily; for even as they touch water, there comes whistling and spattering about them a very hail of bullets. They had been dead men but for the fact that Carlisle had been keeping his eyes open, and had suddenly espied a party of Boers in the act of bringing up their rifles to the "Present." The situation now became exciting. The British covering party opened fire, and the Boers replied to them occasionally; but some scores of rifles were turned on the three daring fellows who were now clinging to the side of the boat.

Meanwhile the four who had returned to the south bank were making frantic but unavailing efforts to haul the pont across. It would not budge an inch. Were they to lose the prey that seemed already theirs? No! A thousand times no! Trooper Cox saved the situation. Heedless of the bullets that splashed the water like drops of hail, that struck the pont, that had already taken some skin off Carlisle's arm, Trooper Cox clambered into the boat. The Boers were being reinforced every minute, and some of them were creeping down nearer to the bank.

Out with the knife. And Cox bent over the stern of the boat and hacked away at the hawser. He was now in full view of the Boer marksmen, and there must have been 200 rifles pointed at his naked body. But Britannia's star was in the ascendant that day, and of all those hundreds of bullets not one reached its mark. Carlisle and the sergeant clambered into the boat also, to bear a hand; but Trooper Cox finished his work alone. It was a long task to cut through the strong, thick hawser; but at last it was done.

Now haul away, you others. Put your backs into it. And they do. Muscles crack like the snap of whipcord. Sweat pours off the naked bodies. Veins seem like to burst. She moves. Hurrah! She moves. The boat, with the other three heroes sitting in it, glides slowly across the water. Faster and faster fly the bullets; not without answer from the men of the covering party, who shiver with fear for their heroes. The pont is half-way over.

Look! The firing has broken out from a fresh place. A squad of Boers have managed to reach a little tongue of land running out into the stream, and these at no more than fifty yards' distance; they are hurling lead at the pont. Haul away, boys! Haul a——! "My God!" The words break from the lips of one of the four. The rope has stuck somewhere, There is something wrong with the pulleys, and there is the pont in mid-stream; stuck; a plain and easy mark for the Mausers.

Howell and another dive in. They investigate the pulleys under water. They put them right with deliberate haste. Then they swim out. Cox jumps overboard to help them, and they push behind. The men on the bank put their backs into it once more; and at last the precious ferry-boat is on the south side of the Tugela. It was a daring bit of work—one of the best performed in the campaign, and the South African Light Horse went wild over the exploit of their comrades. For the whole business had been plainly visible from Spearman's Hill; and you may be sure the spectators had their hearts in their mouths most of the time.

The position was now (Jan. 11th) this:—Lord Dundonald held Springfield Bridge, commanding the three roads to Potgeiter's, Schiet, and Trichardt's Drifts. He also held a position commanding the first of these drifts; and the ferry there, thanks to Cox

and the rest of them, was in his hands. Warren's Division and Hart's troops were on the march over the second half of the road between Frere and Springfield. The naval guns had set out from Chieveley for Springfield, and would have arrived there long before Warren but for the slowness of their infantry escort.

That night Warren encamped at Springfield, and immediately pushed on Lyttelton's (Rifle) Brigade to support Dundonald at Spearman's Hill. Clery, with his division, encamped for the night two miles west of Pretorius's Farm, and about four miles east of Springfield. Hildyard rested with his brigade at Pretorius's Farm. So that the British force was spread out well over the sixteen miles between Frere and Springfield, with an advanced party at Potgeiter's, and a brigade of infantry marching up to reinforce that party.

On the other side of the Tugela the Boers were massing in great force between Potgeiter's and Colenso. So far Buller's plan had succeeded admirably. He had made his move without giving the enemy any notice or warning. He had seized one drift without any loss whatever. And, what was more important than all, he had induced the enemy to believe that the attack was to be made by way of Potgeiter's, for there they were massing their troops and fortifying the ground. As has been said, the Potgeiter's move was only a feint to cover the real attack by Warren *viâ* Trichardt's Drift.

To complete the deception, Buller himself made preparations for removing his headquarters to Spearman's Hill. On the 12th, very early in the morning, two battalions of Lyttelton's men arrived at Dundonald's camp, to be followed, two days later, by the other two battalions of the same brigade; while on the 13th the two 4·7's, with their complement of straw-hatted, khaki-clad sailormen, were pushed on to Spearman's Hill also, and took up a position commanding Potgeiter's Drift. On the 13th, all the troops except Lyttelton's Brigade (Barton's Brigade is out of count, because it had been left to guard Chieveley) were at or near Springfield; and by the 14th were all under canvas at that point. On the 15th Coke's Brigade, consisting of three battalions *—namely, the 2nd Battalions of the Dorset, Somerset Light Infantry, and Middlesex Regiments—was pushed on from Springfield to Spearman's Camp. The naval guns were mounted on Mount Alice, the highest hill from which Potgeiter's could be commanded.

The troops were now disposed finally for the advance. A howitzer battery had come up to Spearman's Camp, and a couple of field batteries and eight 12-pounder naval guns.

And first it became necessary to develop the feint attack by way of Potgeiter's, where the enemy, with amazing industry and skill, could be seen digging trenches, constructing redoubts, and mounting heavy guns. Strangely enough our 4·7's remained silent, though they could have seriously harassed the working parties, and have inflicted, in all probability, serious loss upon them. But it was not until the 16th that Buller gave orders to the Spearman's Camp force to move. This was slow work enough; and the more energetic of the officers grumbled to themselves over it only praying Heaven to grant that it might be as sure as it was slow.

The most distinguishing feature of the operations on the left flank was the

* A brigade of infantry at full strength contains four battalions.

No. 4 MOUNTAIN BATTERY IN ACTION ON SCHWARTZ KOP.

amazing deliberation with which they were conducted. In this case the Boers were allowed four full days—the 12th, 13th, 14th, and 15th—to fortify their ridges and kopjes north of Potgeiter's, so that Dundonald's daring spring almost lost its effect. Not quite. For it left the drift itself at our command. But there can be little doubt that a brigade of infantry with a couple of guns might, on the 12th, have captured and held several miles of dangerous kopjes north of the river—and that at slight loss.

On the 16th Spearman's Camp was astir. The great day had arrived. The two 4·7's at last gave tongue; and their brethren, the 12-pounders, added their voices to the chorus. At 2.30 in the afternoon the word was passed for Lyttelton's Brigade to parade—the Riflemen were to have the honour of being first across the Tugela. The men grew high-spirited on the instant. Then came the order to Dundonald's cavalry and mounted infantry to parade at 5.30. The stalwart troopers looked to their horses. The infantry (Lyttelton's) struck their tents, but not so the mounted division. The camp of the horsemen was on a spur visible to the Boers, and it was intended to allow the Dutchmen to imagine that the whole British force was at Potgeiter's.

To the Scottish Rifles and the Rifle Brigade came the order to move across the drift first—the other two battalions of their brigade (the King's Royal Rifles and the Durham Light Infantry) being told off to cover the crossing. In a thin and streaky column the 4th Brigade moved down to the stream. One man swam and waded over to test the depth. Others followed in twos and threes, and then it was ascertained that the water was breast high. But the current ran rapidly, and men were carried off their feet, and had to be rescued by comrades who could swim. So the soldiers formed chains, their arms interlocked, and an endless chain of brown-clad men moved slowly through the water.

The rope ferry, so daringly captured by the South African Light Horse, could not be used for a long time. It stuck uncompromisingly, and defied the efforts of the Engineers. But Jack was there, with his strength and his ready wit and his knack of overcoming difficulties, and finally he put the thing in working order, so that eventually men could be ferried over the stream.

Company by company, the infantry crossed and formed up on the northern bank. The howitzers and the naval guns stood ready, for it was expected that the Boers, from their position on the neighbouring kopjes, would open fire. They did not. They sat there sullen and silent; and the only show of fight was an occasional sniping shot from some trenches on a ridge formed by three hills (or knolls rising out of one hill) in the tongue of land running down to the drift.

This had to be stopped somehow; and two battalions moved forward. Up they went; a long, loose, brown line, and as they advanced at the double the Mausers one by one ceased their spitting as the holders of them bolted towards their main entrenchments, two miles further back. That night there was bustle at the ferry, as waggons, guns, and men poured over in one continuous stream. The Scottish Rifles and the Rifle Brigade bivouacked in the abandoned advance trenches. The sailormen took charge of the ferry, and their mighty efforts secured the passage of the river with a speed almost incredible. It was 5.30 p.m. on the 16th when the ferry was put in working order, and in ten hours every man and every waggon had crossed.

A howitzer battery also reached the north bank, and all the field guns, leaving only the 4·7's perched on Mount Alice.

Next morning (17th) a furious din arose at about a quarter to 6 a.m. It was the naval guns getting into action against the main Boer position. With hearty goodwill the tars ladled out their lyddite with both hands, and about three-quarters of an hour later the howitzer battery joined in the shelling. On Brakfontein and Spion Kop the shells rained, and as they fell great clouds arose, as earth and rocks flew in the air. The gunnery was magnificent; and the enemy speedily found their trenches becoming uncomfortable. They themselves made no reply; and so cunningly were their guns concealed that not even a balloon could locate them. Wherefore the heavy British guns could only shell the trenches. The naval officers, watching through their telescopes, could see the enemy running as a shell found a new trench; and they could see men being blown up in the air, and dead and wounded carried away.

This was the first crossing of the Tugela by the army of Natal: and the watchers in Ladysmith, hearing the British guns, and seeing shell after shell burst upon the Boer positions, were comforted by the assurance that very soon their vigil would be ended.

Meanwhile, in another part of the field, other important steps had been taken. For it must be remembered that the attack on Potgeiter's was only a feint to cover the operations of Warren's command.

A ZULU KRAAL.

(Photo: G. T. Fernsyhough, F.R.G.S., Pietermaritzburg.)

ENTRENCHING SCHWARTZ KOP.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WARREN'S MOVEMENT ON THE LEFT FLANK: CAPTURE OF SPION KOP.

ON the evening of the 16th January, while Lyttelton's brigade was being moved across the drift at Potgeiter's, the real attack began to develop.

And first Sir Redvers Buller set in motion the mounted division of Dundonald. These troops were intended to protect Warren's advance—to act as a curtain to keep off the flies: as hands and eyes to feel and see the way in the unknown hill country: as fingers wherewith to clutch. And the only pity was that there were not ten times as many of them. For a more serviceable and more workmanlike body than these troopers it would be difficult even to desire.

As has been said in the previous chapter, the mounted division at Spearman's was ordered to parade soon after Lyttelton's brigade. But their destination was not Potgeiter's. Leaving Bethune's Mounted Infantry in camp, the rest turned out. Five days' rations were served out to every man, to be carried by him; and 150 rounds of ammunition. There was no transport, nothing to encumber the little force. The men answered the "Boot and Saddle" gaily; for the orders as to rations and the absence of transport must mean some special service, some pushing on into the enemy's country. And they rejoiced exceedingly at the prospect.

As evening fell the horsemen trotted off, taking a westerly direction following the course of the Tugela. Then it leaked out that they were to meet Warren's column,

and join in some operations on the extreme left flank of the enemy. Dundonald lost no time—losing time was no failing of his—in reaching the rendezvous; and by 9 p.m. his troopers were just south of Trichardt's Drift, on the road leading thither from Springfield Bridge. And before midnight they were rejoiced by the arrival of a mounted orderly, who told them to clear the way. Sir Charles Warren himself, with his staff, soon rode up, and requested Lord Dundonald to take his men a mile or so out of the way, for the whole army corps was on the march. Whereat the hearts of Thorneycroft's men, and the South African Light Horse, and those other heroes who had enlisted on purpose to fight, rejoiced again; for this looked like prompt business.

The night was not of the best. It was raining after the best South African manner, but every heart was light. A retreat in such weather would have been heartbreaking; but when the word was advance! no one heeded the soaking. Up they came. Sixteen thousand men. The field batteries rumbled along. The ox-teams crawled through the downpour. Then came line after line, four after four, of men in khaki.* No sound made they as they marched, save only the muffled tramp, tramp of their footsteps; and that resembled the breaking of waves upon a distant shore. There was no confusion, no mixing of companies. And the men were so eager that, notwithstanding the weight of arms and kit, they swung along at more than the regulation "Quick!" † With such willing troops, no wonder the journey was made quickly and without accident.

No Boer molested the force. There was not a shot fired nor a shell flung as Warren's Army Corps filed amongst and into the hills overlooking the drift; and there seemed no reason why, with no opposition in sight, the sappers should not immediately build the pontoons—of which they carried no fewer than thirty—that night, ready for use at dawn. The undertaking was not easy, because at this point the Tugela was no less than eighty-five yards wide; but it is permissible to think that had the Royal Engineers been told to be rapid in their operations, they would have taken time by the forelock, worked double tides, as Jack says, and done the job.

But—and one is forced to make this observation—nobody who commanded a division in Natal, except Lord Dundonald, seemed to have the slightest idea that rapidity might be conducive to success. Movements were leisurely all round, though, in fact, time was the essence of the matter when dealing with the mobile Boers. And so the left flanking force found itself in the morning in possession of the hills on the south of and commanding Trichardt's Drift, but with its bridges still to build. When the Boers discovered at dawn that a large British force threatened them at this point, they began to entrench themselves and to send for reinforcements from their main body. And they had plenty of time to make a strong position—nature having provided them with a favourable site—and to procure their reinforcements before Warren could get a single gun or a single battalion to the north bank.

When the bridge-building began, it was soon accomplished. Boer trenches could

* They were in quarter-column of route—*i.e.* with a face of four men.

† Men quick-marching are supposed to cover a little more than three miles an hour. An instance, however, recently occurred in which a party of volunteers performed the astonishing feat of twenty-two miles in 4½ hours.

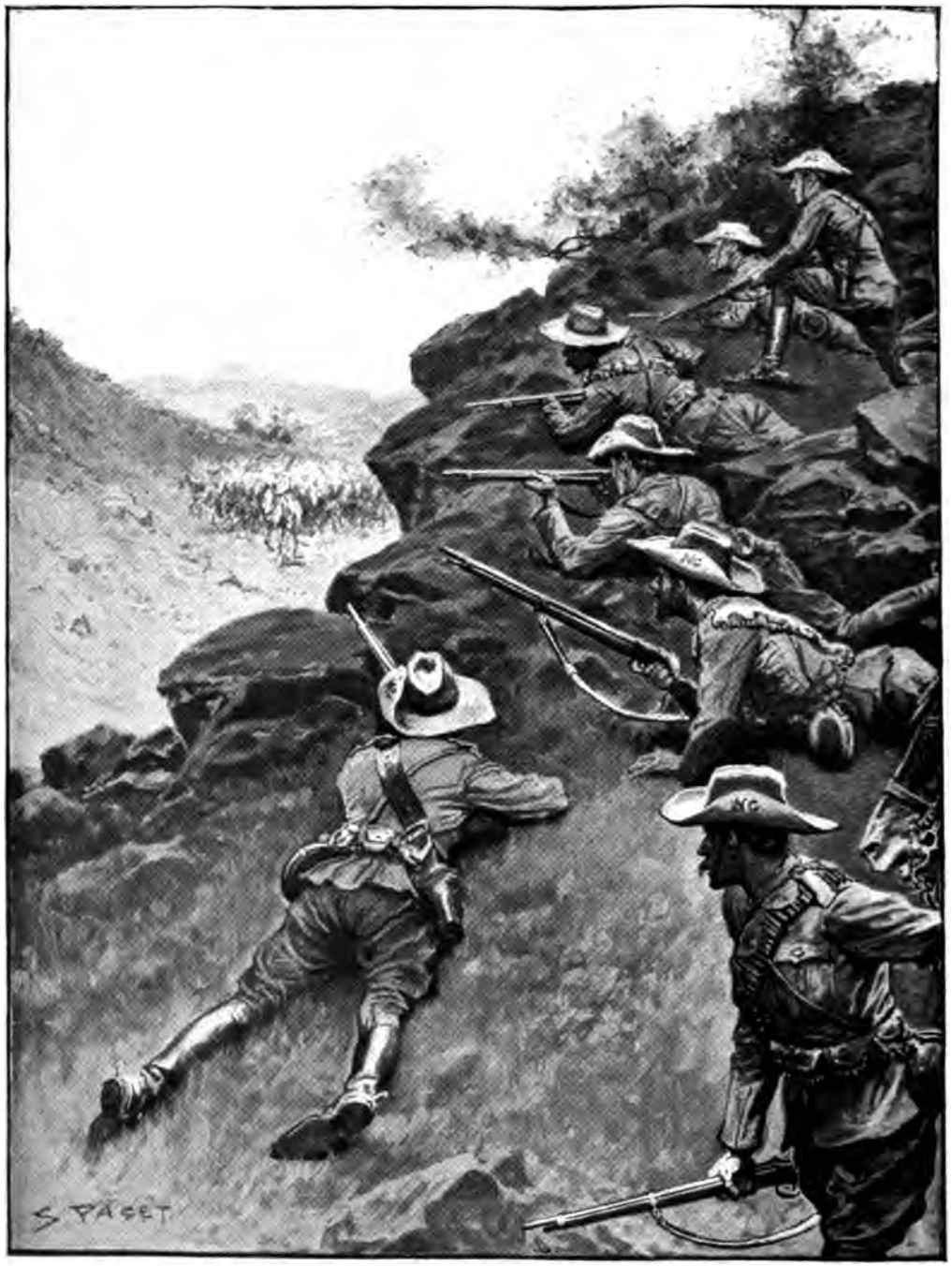
be observed commanding the drift, but in what force they were occupied nobody knew. At about 8 a.m. Warren's field guns opened on these trenches, and pitched quantities of shrapnel into them. But not a Boer showed. Wherefore one or two of Dundonald's ever-ready men swam and waded to the north bank, to find the trenches quite empty. By half-past nine a.m. the bridge was completed—a pontoon bridge eighty-five yards long — with scarcely any interruption from the enemy. A dozen of them or so came down to a farmhouse overlooking the drift, and started sniping. At first their shots went wide, and nobody took any notice of them; but at last one struck down and killed a private of the Devons. Then it was time to intervene; so a field-gun dropped a couple of shells into the farmhouse, with the result that the sniping ceased, and the sappers finished their job in peace and quietness.

While this was going on the infantry was beginning to cross the river. The pontoon bridge was for the artillery and the stores, the waggons and other transport. The men were sent over in ponts —ferried over, in fact. Hildyard's Brigade had the honour, and the first battalion to cross was the 2nd West Yorkshire Regiment. The Devons, spread out on the south bank, covering the crossing. As company after company arrived, the West Yorks entrenched themselves on the north bank, ready to hold the drift while the Devons crossed.

When the bridge was finished, Hart's Brigade marched over; and they, with Hildyard's men, moved to the positions lately shelled by the field guns. Woodgate's Lancashire lads followed over, and last of all Dundonald's cavalry. The Cavalry Division did not cross by bridge or ponts. They had to wade the stream a quarter of a mile lower down, at Wagon Drift. And the river, being in flood, was too much for many of them. Horses were swept off their feet, and scores were within an ace of drowning. One trooper, a Hussar, was swept away by the torrent; and an officer (Captain Tremayne) of the same regiment, who jumped in after him, was only just rescued in time—he was insensible when fished out of the river.

Early in the day (17th) the artillery crossed by the pontoon bridge, and established itself in position north of the river, while Woodgate's and Hart's men went forward, after careful scouting, and took possession of the hills commanding the drift on the northern side of the river. Still, the advance was slow in the extreme. The motto seemed to be "No hurry," and it was not until the 18th that the main part of the transport crossed the Tugela. Not that Warren was overloaded with provisions. He had only four days' rations for the corps with him; for Buller, in order not to overburden him with transport, had given only that allowance, and had promised to send after him such further supplies as might be needed. Of course, provisions for four days for 16,000 men are not to be carried in a portmanteau. Here, the whole of it was drawn by ox-waggons. Then there was the Field Hospital, the ammunition waggons, and reserve ammunition waggons, the water carts, and what not.

Napoleon had a maxim to this effect: That a flank march should be the shortest possible, and the rapidest possible. And he knew something of the art and practice of warfare. As to this flank movement, all that was done on the 18th of January by the main body of the troops (*i.e.* the infantry and artillery) was to move forward about two miles.



"THE MAIN BODY . . . IS WITHIN 300 YARDS."

The small Mounted Division was more active. Dundonald's work was to clear the way up to Acton Homes, to find how far in that direction the enemy's flank extended, how he was entrenched, and what guns he had. It was, in fact, a reconnaissance in force, with liberty to fight should the commanding officer deem it advisable.

Admirably was the work done. Burdened by no transport, with every man mounted and carrying his own food and ammunition, Dundonald set out from the north bank of the Tugela on the 18th, what time the waggons were filing over the pontoon bridge. And the gallant Earl, once he received orders to push forward, was not the kind of man to let grass grow under the hoofs of his steed. The troops at the back of him were the 13th Hussars, and the 5th (Royal) Dragoons, men of lance and sabre; 350 of a composite regiment of mounted infantry under Major Graham, composed of one section King's Royal Rifles (60th), and one squadron each of the Imperial Light Horse and Natal Carbineers; four squadrons of the South African Light Horse, under Colonel Byng—Cape men and adventurers from the old country, the Colonies, and America; and Thorneycroft's Horse, Outlanders and Natalians, valuable from their knowledge of the country. The composite regiment moved ahead, scouting, leaving the rest of the force spreading itself out over the kopjes near the river. Graham's men rode fast and well along the road to Acton Homes, spreading out patrols on either side to "feel" the country. For quite five miles they thus advanced without sight or sound of a Boer, until at last a patrol brought word that a body of mounted men, some 200 in number, could be seen moving along some hills in the direction of Acton Homes.

The importance of Acton Homes to the Boers lay in this, that here the roads leading from Natal (south of Ladysmith) into the Free State meet. Wherefore it was conjectured that the body seen by the patrol was posting off to secure the point where the roads met. Now, you mounted men, show that you can move. Like lightning the main body of the composite regiment puts itself in motion. If we can reach yonder kopje before the Boers have passed a certain piece of road we shall be able to strike an effective stroke. For we shall probably surprise them, since our route to the kopje is well covered by other hills, and we shall cut off their road to Acton Homes. So ride, ride.

This was just the kind of work for the Imperials and Natal Carbineers, and as for the Mounted Infanty of the 60th they were able, by following the guidance of the more experienced veldt-men, to take cover for themselves and their horses. By taking cover is meant not lying down or crouching behind boulders or ant-heaps, but rather, riding in such a way as to shade themselves by intervening hills and rising ground from the scouts of the Boers who rode along the road.

Whip and spur! Gallop! Gallop! The men of the composite regiment spared not their horses. And it was as well that they did not, for they reached their point of vantage only in the very nick of time.

They dismount immediately the hill becomes steep. Then they crawl up cautiously, taking care that they do not show a hat or helmet above the crest of the rise. Fortunately the Boers have for once been ill supplied with information by their scouts. It turns out

that they have relied upon scouting done by an Austrian—there are many Austrians and Germans in the commando—and he has reported that the head of the British column is two miles away. The composite regiment stealthily lines the crest of the kopje, every man behind a stone or a mound of earth.

The Boers ride straight up the road past the foot of the hill, their scouts thrown out in advance ; but the British lie low and make no sign to betray their whereabouts. For once in a way the Boers are completely deceived. The main body comes riding up in every assurance of safety, and is within three hundred yards or so of the muzzles of the British carbines and rifles. It seems as though we should at last make a decided and complete capture of a whole body of them. They have enough, and more than enough, of our men in Pretoria. We want a few more of theirs at St. Helena to balance the account.

Then a shot breaks forth.

One of the Imperial Light Horse, who has been lying there for nearly five minutes with his hand on the trigger of his carbine, overcome by excitement, presses and fires. The Boer column halts dead on the instant. It is no good trying to conceal ourselves now. "Fire!" A withering volley mows down the head of the commando. Horses drop and men ; and some reel in their saddles, the blood running from arm and chest. Like a flock of frightened seagulls they wheel and fly ; but another murderous volley cuts short the running of some of them. Some hundred or so betake themselves to a kopje close to our position and prepare to make a fight of it. The rest ride back in the direction which they came.

Graham sends back a galloper towards Dundonald to tell him that he has some Boers well in hand, but is afraid they may get away unless reinforcements are sent large enough to completely surround them. The general gives orders to one squadron of the South African Light Horse to move off to the support of the composite regiment ; and when these arrive they find the Carbineers and the Light Horsemen lying behind rocks on their kopje, quite invisible to the Boers, and blazing away at another kopje upon which nothing is visible except some big black stones and occasionally the muzzle of a rifle.

The reinforcements, with the 60th Mounted Infantry Section, proceed to surround the hill that the Boers are holding so bravely ; and when the Dutchmen see them coming some make a dash to escape before the hill is totally encircled. They have to run the gauntlet of about as hot a fire as they could possibly encounter at the hands of British soldiers. For the South African Light Horse are all picked marksmen, and the 60th Mounted Infantry Section contains most of the sharpshooters of a crack Rifle Battalion. But fortune favours the brave, and many of those who have the courage to make a dash for liberty succeed in breaking through before the surrounding circle becomes complete. Those who have not the pluck to make a dash for it—or, perhaps, are too stubborn and too courageous to retire from the position they hold—lie behind the black boulders and continue to fire with caution. Luckily without effect.

The 60th, being Regulars, desire to come to close quarters ; so while the South Africans keep up a close and continuous fire at the skyline with their carbines and three machine guns, the 60th crawl, or rather wriggle along the ground

closer and closer to the enemy's position. They beg their company officer to allow them to try a rush with the steel. He consents. For, like most British infantry officers, he has infinite faith in the bayonet. With a clash the steel is fixed upon the muzzles of the rifles. "Charge!" The whole section springs to its feet as one man, and in a loose line bolts up the steep hill-side as though running a race in the sports at Aldershot.

But the marksmen on the kopje are not of the kind to be daunted by the sight of the bayonet; and they take steady aim. Two of the riflemen bite the dust. They will take part in no more bayonet rushes. For each of them has a hole in the forehead, and another one at the back. The officer comes to the conclusion that the game is not worth the candle. It is neither sound tactics nor anything except wanton waste of blood to lead such a scanty force to the carrying of such a position held by marksmen and magazine rifles. So the officer orders his men to lie down, which they do surlily enough. They are within fifty yards of their destination, and not a man of them but is willing to take his risk of a South African grave for the chance of five minutes with the Dutchmen at six feet distance.

But discipline is discipline, and orders must be obeyed. So the men lie down flat in the dust and wriggle back to their old starting-point, which happens to be a donga affording the best of cover. They make their retirement in a style which shows how much our men have learned since Talana and Elandslaagte, for they lose never a man in the operation.

But although the Boers have repulsed the cold steel, they are doomed. There is a circle of fire drawn round them such as it is impossible for them to break through. The question is, Will they surrender, or will they fight to the last and sell their lives dearly? It may cost us a hundred men, but this much is certain—we must have them dead or alive. The machine guns of the South African Light Horse and the carbines and rifles of the composite regiment keep up a continual stream of bullets directed at the top of the kopje and the invisible Dutchmen behind the stones. A white flag has been seen once or twice above the boulders; but when our men have ceased fire at the signal, their only reward has been a fiercer volley from the hill-top.

Now the Dutchmen's fire has considerably slackened. Once more a white flag flutters above a big black stone. Our men, who think it only another ruse, shout fiercely in execration and contempt. But my Lord Dundonald has arrived and is in command, and he at once orders the "Cease fire!" He would not, upon any provocation, fire upon an enemy who really wished to surrender; and his policy proves to be correct. For this time it is no ruse. As soon as the British musketry ceases, an old grizzled Boer stands straight up, the white flag in his hand. Now our men cheer, for this is victory. Not so complete and so decisive, perhaps, as if that enthusiastic Imperial had not handled his carbine so nervously—but still a victory. And, what is more, first blood to the Cavalry Division.

On arriving at the top of the hill, it is seen that there are ten dead bodies there. One is the corpse of the Boer commandant, De Mentz, a field cornet of Heilbron. There are eight wounded men and twenty-three whole and sound. Besides these, a good many Boers were wounded when we gave them our first volley at 300 yards. Our own loss is slight; but for

the bayonet charge there would have been no loss of life at all on our side, for the only killed are the two men of the King's Royal Rifles, who were shot within fifty yards of the Boer position. There are also two wounded, one officer and one man.

Thus, at the price of four casualties, Dundonald has accomplished a very excellent piece of business. He has captured a position of some importance to us, and of considerably more importance to the Boers. He has cut off their easiest route of retreat into the Free State, and now it only remains for Sir Charles Warren to follow up the stroke by sending a brigade of infantry to extend the position somewhat, to force the Boers either to retire past Ladysmith or to stand and fight. Moreover, Warren can now, if he chooses to be quick, gain the coveted level ground at the north of Spion Kop and Brakfontein. So Dundonald held the position he had taken, and waited as patiently as might be.

He needed all the patience that he had, for Warren's force was being moved in the most leisurely manner. It was not until late on the night of the 18th that he had all his division and his transport and artillery across the river. Meanwhile the enemy had been busy fortifying on his right in such a way as to command the road they knew he must take. Ahead of him also they had built breastworks of stone on every hillside; and by the time he was ready to move they had their artillery in position and were perfectly ready to receive him. At about 3 o'clock on the morning of the 19th Warren's division got under weigh. His march lay along the front of the Boer position; and it was slow, terribly slow. It was impossible for him to form a flying column, or to move at anything like the speed required for a successful outflanking movement, when he was cumbered with nearly seven miles of waggons. His first day's performance somewhat resembled that of the famous Duke of York, "who had ten thousand men, he marched them up to the top of the hill and he marched them down again." For what Sir Charles Warren did was to creep about five miles up the road towards Acton Homes and then back again—an operation which took him all day. That night the men encamped about two miles north of Trichardt's Drift—just about the place they had started from.

At the time this was being done the force at Potgeiter's Drift was doing the best it could to afford him assistance. As has been before explained, the mission of this force was to make a feint attack upon the Boer centre while Sir Charles Warren marched clean round their left. So all day on the 19th the naval guns on Mount Alice and the howitzers on the north bank threw ton after ton of lyddite into the Boer positions at Brakfontein and Spion Kop. The howitzers as well as the naval guns were firing lyddite, for this had been found the most effective explosive for use against a rocky position. The guns shelled the hills wherever there appeared to be a Boer trench or a Boer sangar. It was slow work for the gunners, but occasionally they were rejoiced by being told to direct their fire at a convoy of waggons or a party of the enemy's horsemen some four or five miles away.

That night Sir Charles Warren held a council of war, to which were called all his staff officers, the brigade commanders, the chief officer of Engineers, and the chief officer of Artillery. The general pointed out to them that of the two roads by which they could advance the one by Acton Homes must be rejected because

A COMMON TRANSPORT ACCIDENT.

"time would not allow of it."* One naturally asks why "time would not allow." And the answer seems to be that his enormous transport made it impossible for Sir Charles Warren to move at a rate much exceeding half a dozen miles a day, and that he only had at that time provisions for three and a half days. It should, however, be observed that Sir Redvers Buller had foreseen this, and had promised to send after the division a sufficient quantity of supplies.

Sir Charles Warren pointed out to the council of war that the way of getting round by the second route involved a complete departure from the instructions of Sir Redvers Buller. These instructions were to decline battle with his right, to press forward his left, and sweep round some miles north of Spion Kop. To go by the second road would involve an immediate battle with the enemy, for it would be imperatively necessary to attack, and that at once, the Boer position in the immediate front and to clear it of the enemy.

Marching by the unauthorised route would also involve something else very much more serious. For it would mean that instead of the division marching round wide of Spion Kop it would have to pass along a road within 2,000 yards of the enemy's position on that mountain. Such a route could not, of course, be followed while the enemy was in possession of a position commanding the road, and it must therefore become necessary, as soon as the immediate position in front was cleared, to make a direct or frontal attack upon Spion Kop—the very thing Sir Redvers Buller had been anxious to avoid.

Had the original plan been adhered to, it is most likely that as soon as the Boer leaders perceived a large British force working round their left they would have abandoned the Spion Kop position altogether. If not, they would have found themselves cut off. Had they on the other hand elected to fight, the British would have been able to attack Spion Kop from the north, where the ascent was comparatively easy. The most difficult ascent was from the south-west. Warren was right in one respect, however, for Spion Kop was undoubtedly the key of Ladysmith.

The first thing to be done in accordance with the new scheme was to clear out the Boers from the position immediately opposite Trichardt's Drift. This position was one highly favourable to defence by skilful marksmen, consisting as it did of a half circle of ridges and kopjes sloping round to the Tugela on right and left. In the middle of the half circle was a hill called Three Tree Hill, which had fortunately been seized by Woodgate's Brigade; and as soon as the general commanding decided to drive the enemy from their ridges half a dozen field batteries were sent to the top of Three Tree Hill, whence they could command every inch of the Boer semi-circle. The attack was to be by infantry on the right and left flanks of the ridge, and was to be covered by shrapnel-fire. Woodgate's and Hart's Brigades were selected as the force to assault the position.

The Boers were in the most considerable strength, and held the most formidable position on our left. Wherefore a brigade and a half was to attack them on the left, while half a brigade was to storm the right half of the ridge. The two brigades paraded at 3 a.m. on the 20th, but operations did not really begin until four hours

* Sir C. Warren's official report to General Buller

later, when the guns of the field batteries having been got into position, the 1st South Lancashire and the 2nd Lancasters were ordered to advance on the right. They drew upon themselves immediately the fire of several pieces of artillery, of which the most conspicuous were some of our own 15-pounder field guns (captured at Colenso), and several of the quick-firing guns that began the war under the name of 1-pounder Maxims, and ended it under the appellation of "Pom-poms." The shells were well aimed; but the star of Lancashire was in the ascendant. Hardly a single man was hit. At the foot of the ridge the men deployed, spreading themselves out in two enormously long lines, one about fifty yards behind the other, and with about three or four yards between the men in the line—a kind of formation that would have taken away the breath of those writers on warfare who laid down as a maxim that troops should always be concentrated for an attack.

Hart's Irishmen and the other half of the Lancashire Brigade (the 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers and the 1st York and Lancaster Regiment) had to make a considerable march before beginning to climb the ridge on the left. And when they did begin, they had a task of the greatest possible difficulty before them. They had to climb a sort of spur, which was intersected with dongas and broken by huge rocks to such an extent that it was impossible for any company, or section, or battalion to keep any kind of formation ever heard of or dreamt of by military expert. Go-as-you-please was the only kind of order there possibly could be.

It was eleven o'clock in the morning before Hart's men really began their attack. They had been drawn up for about three hours under the shelter of a sudden slope in the hill, which afforded them absolute cover from anything except howitzer shells.* An hour before noon, just as the Dublin Fusiliers were becoming impatient, the order came to deploy for the attack. And the Dublin Fusiliers, to their great joy and the envy of all the other battalions, were ordered to lead.

Battle was now fully joined. The roar of thirty-six field guns from Three Tree Hill was absolutely continuous. There was no moment at which one or more of the 15-pounders was not belching shrapnel at the ridge. And five miles to the right the naval gunners and the men of the howitzer batteries were pumping lyddite into Brakfontein and Spion Kop. The din was such as has probably never been heard in warfare; and there was something weird about it, because the explosive used was smokeless. The guns were hidden in emplacements or behind ridges or crests, and the continuous thunder seemed to come from nowhere. Then, as the British infantry swarmed up the slopes on right and left and came within range of the Boers behind their sangars, the crackle of musketry was added to the boom of the heavy guns.

It was slow work, this storming of the ridge at Trichardt's Drift. A man would be lying down behind a stone for perhaps an hour, not daring to move for fear of the bullets that splattered up the dust around. Then he would perceive that the enemy's fire had slackened for a moment, and would rise and rush as hard as his legs would carry him to the next boulder a little farther up the hill. Or he would wriggle on his belly from behind his cover, and progress up the hill snakelike to the next

* Howitzer shells drop from a great height, and are, therefore, good for "searching" a position which is protected in front but not roofed over.

bit of protection. Orders of the strictest had been issued to officers and privates alike as to the strong necessity of taking cover during these attacks; and the infantry having by this time learned from experience not only the value of the cover system, but also the way to take advantage of it, the attack was not at all expensive.

It is impossible to give any account of the operation of Hart's and Woodgate's Brigade, except to say this: That the men advanced with all the bravery and more than the usual skill of the British infantry. That they were under fire from seven o'clock in the morning until seven o'clock at night. That they crept up the hill and along the ridge foot by foot, firing as skilfully as any commando of burghers who ever followed Joubert. There was nothing brilliant — no splendid bayonet charge with rush and chase. Only the doggedest perseverance.

And at last they won the ridge. Two hundred men were carried off its slopes by the ambulance bearers, a few dead, most wounded; and of the wounded the greater part were merely touched, and would be fit for duty again in a few days. The Dublin Fusiliers had their usual luck. They were in the front, and they suffered the most heavily. Indeed, by this time they had lost in the campaign just about half their strength, and their officers had suffered such loss as no other regiment in the Army had experienced. But they were cheerful enough. They had enlisted that they might fight. They had come out to Africa that they might fight. They enjoyed fighting. They looked upon the days spent without a fight simply as wasted time. Now they were thoroughly enjoying themselves.

It was wonderful to see and hear these Irishmen. They laughed and jested all the way up. They derided the Boer marksmen. They chaffed one another. Not hunger, nor thirst, nor wounds, nor imminent sudden death could stay their gaiety. And then their bravery! One poor fellow with a bullet through his jaw was brought down to the hospital unable to speak. He signed for writing material to be brought. They brought him slate and pencil, thinking he wished to ask for something to ease his pain. And this is what he wrote: "Are we at the top yet?" It is by incidents such as this, by uncomplaining suffering, as well as by desperate valour, that the Irish regiments of the Queen won the love and the wondering admiration of the Empire.

The South Lancasters also had their ranks thinned; for they had been in the front on the right. Worthily that day did the sons of Erin and lads of Lancashire uphold the honour of their name. They had been set to a hard task, one of the hardest tasks that could possibly be set to infantry—the task, that is, of taking by attack, almost frontal, mountainous positions strongly held by skilled marksmen. They had succeeded, as succeed they must; and it said much both for the skill and intelligence of the men themselves, as well as for the leading of their officers, that they had captured the ridge with only a trifling loss.

At 7 o'clock p.m., then, on the 20th of January, Sir Charles Warren had driven the Boer force from the first position on his left flank; and he was now able to see what their other positions were. He saw that the next post to be taken was one on comparatively level ground immediately behind the ridge just stormed.

The evil of the long delay occasioned by the highly deliberate methods adopted,

by the time wasted in crossing at the drift, by the cumbering of the division with such enormous impedimenta, was now seen. Sir Charles Warren ought to have been at Springfield a whole day before he actually arrived. He ought to have been across the Tugela two days, or even three, before he was. He ought to have been well on the road to Acton Homes on the 18th. If he had started, and pushed forward with all speed on that day, he could have reached Acton Homes almost unopposed. For there was no adequate force of Boers there ready to meet him, nor was every foot of ground fortified to impede his advance. As it was, as soon as he carried one position he found another immediately behind it.

On the left, Dundonald's men were protecting our left flank, spreading themselves out as wide as might be so as to prevent any part of the mobile enemy's force from working round and taking our men in the rear. Colonel Byng, in command of the South African Light Horse, saw on the Boers' extreme right a hill obviously held by them in some strength. This was the hill afterwards christened "Bastion Hill." Byng decided that his men should capture this somewhat important position, which he believed to be the key of the outlying works of the Boers. It was a daring undertaking, when one considers the fact that the attacking party had no artillery to support them and did not possess one bayonet amongst the whole regiment.

But Byng knew what he was about. He divided his troops into two bodies, one half he sent to the side of the hill where the ascent afforded the most cover, while he himself led the other half to the opposite side, straight to a donga which cleft its way into the hill. The party to make the attack was led by Major Childe, of whom mention has been made, while Colonel Byng intended to use his half as a covering party. So he led them up the donga, where plenty of cover was, dismounted them, picketed the horses in a sheltered spot, and ordered his men to line the edges of the donga and fire at the top of the hill. The Boers had artillery, not on top of Bastion Hill, but in other positions within 1,000 yards of it, and from their guns they poured shell into the donga and upon Major Childe's force, which had now begun the attack.

But, nothing daunted, the Light Horse crawled and crept and wriggled in their own inimitable style up the kopje. If anything, they were even better than the Dublin Fusiliers, for they hardly lost a man during the assault. They attacked in no sort of formation or line or anything of that kind; but every man crawled up from one boulder or ant-heap to another ant-heap or boulder, his only idea being to take as much cover for his mortal body as was consistent with the attainment of the top of the hill. Those men who were most agile made the most progress; and there were some who contrived to crawl into excellent positions comparatively near the summit of the kopje, whence they could pick off the Boers with great comfort and convenience to themselves.

So close and so deadly was the fire of the troopers that the Boers presently had enough of it; and when one man, whose name was Tobin, a trooper in the Light Horse, crawled far ahead of all his company and reached the crest of the kopje, he was delighted to find that the enemy had entirely abandoned the position. So overjoyed was he that he stood up straight and waved his hat to communicate the joyful tidings to his friends below. As he stood there alone in his glory, a con-

HART'S BRIGADE STORMING THE KOPJES.

spicuous object upon the sky-line, he became a target for a perfect hurricane of shot and shell from the neighbouring hills.

He also ran no slight risk of sudden death at the hands of his friends; for the covering party, not being able at that distance to distinguish friend from foe, and having nothing in the way of uniform to guide them, levelled their rifles and made a target of the enterprising trooper. Fortunately for him, the distance which constituted his danger also constituted his safety; and he did not forget afterwards to compliment his comrades upon the excellence of their marksmanship. But soon the South Africans grasped the situation, and with a shout of triumph the attacking party, headed by Major Childe, raced up the remaining yards of the slope. They had won the position, of that there was no doubt. Could they keep it? Of that there were very grave doubts indeed.

For the Boers had numerous positions from 4,000 to 1,000 yards away, from each and all of which they could pour in a hot fire upon Bastion Hill. They had two pom-poms playing upon it one continuous vicious stream of 1-pound shells. They had also two of our own 15-pounders, at a range of not more than 2,000 yards. The South Africans proceeded to entrench themselves, to erect stone breastworks, and to select every mound and rise in the ground behind which they could take cover. But they did not escape scatheless.

Major Childe, who had led the assault to victory, had had strange forebodings that morning before "Boot and Saddle" sounded. He had told several of his brother officers that he was quite sure the day would be his last. He did not grieve over it. He did not pretend that he should regret life. Only he had a strange presentiment of death. And he had asked his comrades to bury him where he fell, and had even selected a short inscription for his tombstone. Melancholy to relate, the gallant major fell in the hour of triumph. A shell from one of our 15-pounders burst close to him and killed him on the instant. He was an officer extremely popular with all ranks. By this time he was a middle-aged man, but in his youth he had held a commission in the Guards. The sound of the trumpet had brought him out to South Africa to strike one more blow for Queen and country ere old age should paralyse his sword-arm. To him no less than to the colonel of the regiment was due the welding of the heterogeneous elements that formed the South African Light Horse into a disciplined regiment, equal to any work that mounted infantry might be called upon to accomplish.

He had the satisfaction, before he died, of seeing his troopers do more than one fine piece of work. The capture of the ferry at Potgeiter's, the surrounding of the Boer patrol at Acton Homes, and now the taking of Bastion Hill. Few other corps could boast such a record in a month's active service. And now their gallant major, a man who was, as one of them said, the father of every one in the regiment, was awaiting burial. They buried him at the foot of the hill the next day, and Lord Dundonald, an old schoolfellow of his, read the burial service over him. For of chaplain or priest the South African Light Horse had none. The general's voice broke as he read; and the stalwart adventurers, who held life so cheap, sobbed as they gazed for the last time upon the face of the man who had led them so often. Wrapped in his cavalry cloak, they laid him in the earth, and over his grave they erected a rough stone, and upon it

roughly carved the inscription he himself had selected :—

"IS IT WELL WITH THE CHILD? IT IS WELL."

For hours the dismounted troopers held Bastion Hill in face of a fire as concentrated and as fierce as any seen that day. But they could not expect to hold it much longer without support. They must have guns, and infantry with rifles. For be it remembered the South Africans had only carbines—good enough weapons in their way, and accurate, but of short range. And it is ill for a man with a gun that is sighted up to 1,800 yards to oppose himself to one who carries a weapon that will kill at 2,800. So Lord Dundonald sent to Sir Charles Warren and told him of the position that had been won by the gallant Irregulars—told him that this position could be used as a point of vantage from which to cope with the Boers on our extreme left—told him how important it was that the position should be held by us. And told him further that it would be impossible to hold it without artillery and without riflemen.

General Warren immediately recognised the importance of Bastion Hill, and he issued orders at once for General Hildyard with his brigade to move off to the support of the Mounted Division with all speed. Hildyard was by no means loth, and his men set out for the extreme left with light and buoyant step. For they imagined that there would be plenty of work for them, plenty of hard fighting, and perhaps a chance to get even with the Boers on that Colenso account. It was about midnight when General Hildyard's Brigade arrived at Bastion Hill, and by the early hours in the morning they were in possession of it, and the South African Light Horse was relieved of its onerous charge.

Carrying out the original plan, the troops at Potgeiter's Drift were feinting all day. Their business was not so much to fight as to make the Boers believe that they were going to fight, and might deliver an attack at any moment. It requires but the slightest knowledge of military matters to perceive that if the British infantry marched out in considerable strength towards Brakfontein Bridge, the Boers would be bound to retain there a large number of troops to oppose them, which would disable them from sending their total strength to oppose Warren in his flanking movements.

So Lyttelton's Brigade moved straight up the road which leads from Potgeiter's to Ladysmith, where, as has been said, General Joubert had stationed a large body of troops to block the way. The 60th and the Rifle Brigade, supported by the Scottish Rifles (Cameronians) and the Durham Light Infantry, marched with the utmost coolness within 1,500 yards of the Brakfontein position. When we say they marched, the reader must not picture to himself a march of the Guards in Hyde Park. The four battalions named were spread over about $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles of country from flank to flank and about $2\frac{1}{2}$ from front to rear. They were, in fact, simply 4,000 men dotted here and there over the veldt, but all advancing in the same direction in the most wonderful style. Having reached the 1,500 yards' limit, the brigade proceeded to entrench itself, and from the entrenchments to open fire upon the enemy. There was some very pretty shooting. For the 60th and the Scottish Rifles prided themselves upon their markmanship, and the other two battalions could shoot somewhat. It was a game of long bowls, and a whole day of it did not do so much actual damage—did not cause so much actual slaughter as ten

minutes with the bayonet would have done. But then a bayonet charge is a rare luxury in these days. At one time you could throw a battalion at entrenchments, confident that if you did not lose many men by the enemy's first discharge, you said that, so far as their part of the operation was concerned, the Rifle Brigade did everything that could be desired of it. All day long the four battalions were lying down and firing at anything hostile that could be seen—not to mention many a

COLONEL BLAKE OF THE TRANSVAAL IRISH BRIGADE

would be pretty sure to come to close quarters with them. But now, when your foe can shoot at you a dozen times while you are covering 500 yards, a bayonet charge is a matter of the greatest difficulty.

It was not intended that Lyttelton's Brigade should become really closely engaged, save in so far as it might be necessary for them to keep going the Boers opposite to them. And it must be shot fired on the chance of hitting something or somebody.

The darkness fell at last; and it found the troops thus disposed:—Warren's division (which included for purposes of this operation the division of General Clery) had been successful all along the line. On its right* it had captured the first of the Boer positions at an expense comparatively

* That is, the right of the British left wing.

slight. The troops had proved that their reverse at Colenso had in no way discouraged them nor disheartened them. They had fought for twelve hours without food or water and without seeming any the worse for it at the end of the day. This proved beyond cavil that the Army was in the best possible condition. Physique and morale of the best—what more could any general possibly ask in the troops under his command?

On the extreme left, the cavalry division had captured Bastion Hill and were holding it—a post of the highest importance. In the Boer centre, opposite Potgeiter's, Lyttelton's brigade had already made some progress, and the howitzers and the naval guns had obtained the range of the Boer trenches to a nicety. At Colenso, on the right, Barton had not been molested since our troops had set out for Springfield. He himself had thrown out strong patrols towards Hlangwane Hill and that point where the Tugela suddenly bends north; and these patrols had come in contact with patrols from the other side—with the result that many a fierce skirmish had taken place between them. On one occasion thirteen of our irregulars had been cut off. Six, wounded and unwounded, were made prisoners, four had escaped, and the rest were killed. The next day two of the British patrols cut off a similar party of Boers, killing and wounding more than half of them, and capturing two prisoners. These parties were sent out from each side on this flank, because both sides dreaded that the enemy might be sending a strong flanking party out; and the mounted patrols had to cover a wide extent of country to make sure that no large party could slip past them.

So far the British had the advantage in the second move towards Ladysmith. Next day (Sunday, January 21st) Sir Charles Warren was early afield on the ridge that his infantry had won, to survey the country ahead and discover what lay before him. Greatly to his dismay and surprise, he found that he had not by any means captured the main Boer position on the left. The ridge he had taken was nothing more than an advance line of defence. Ahead of him, some 1,400 yards, was another and a stronger position. It was a grassy hill, with a plateau at the top. The hillside was formed of a succession of very gradual slopes. There was no cover at all for troops advancing up these slopes for the plateau. Every yard of the ground was seamed with trenches—trenches so skilfully placed that the defenders of the hill would be able to concentrate and fire from several directions upon any infantry who had the temerity to attack frontally. From the ridge held by them Warren's troops would have to descend a somewhat steep incline, cross a narrow valley, and then ascend the grassy open slopes aforesaid. And every yard of the way they would be in full view of the gunners and riflemen lining the trenches on the slopes and the plateau. A most formidable position. General Warren had imagined that when he should have cleared the ridge as he had done he would find the ground behind comparatively open. So he did. It was open in the sense that it afforded him no cover, being open to the fire of the enemy from all sides. The plateau itself was a marvel of impromptu fortifications. By labour almost incredible the Transvaalers who occupied it had thrown up earthworks, had erected stone breastworks, well loopholed, and had dug trenches with the earth turned up at the back so as to make a false parapet, and enable the occupant of the trench to show his head

above the level without making a target of it against the skyline.

Little was done that Sunday. Woodgate's and Hart's brigades were massed again on the right, while Hildyard, on the extreme left at Bastion Hill, was ordered to push forward with his force as far as he could go without losing touch of the main body. What fighting there was fell chiefly to the lot of the English brigade. The Boers recognised the importance of the British occupation of Bastion Hill. It was the thin end of the wedge. Wherefore they concentrated every gun and every rifle they could spare upon the troops who occupied that kopje, or who were disposed so as to guard it. Of such importance did they deem the point that Joubert sent from Ladysmith three or four guns and 2,000 men, whose departure was watched by Sir George White's scouts and duly signalled by heliograph to Sir Redvers Buller. For so close was the relief force to the beleaguered garrison that a naval gun on Wagon Hill was dropping its shells within four miles of the point where the shells from the naval guns on Mount Alice were bursting.

But Hildyard held his own. His men were not made of the stuff to be intimidated by the Boers, be they 2,000 more or less, or 20,000. They held Bastion Hill, and more than held it. For by persistent fighting, wriggling along by inches for hour after hour, they contrived to gain two miles of road. So far so good. Warren was pushing forward to the left (that is Hildyard) and working round the Boer lines. He had been slow. Possibly he would be sure. All the other troops of the left flank force other than the English brigade had very little to do all day. At first Sir Charles Warren thought he would advance his batteries from Three Tree Hill to the ridge he had captured the day before—thence he would shell the enemy's main position, and under cover of the shelling would hurl his brave Irishmen and Lancashire lads at the trenches. But he found it impossible, for the very good reason that he could not place a single gun upon the captured ridge. Wherefore his batteries had to remain upon Three Tree Hill, and do what damage they could from there. The range was so great, and the chances of hitting our own troops were so much more likely than the chances of hitting the enemy, that the field guns were obliged to be circumspect. It was very little harm they were able to inflict upon the Boers that day, and Sir Charles Warren perceived that if he intended to shell the enemy at all he must have some guns of much heavier calibre than anything he had at present. So he telegraphed to Spearman's Camp to Sir Redvers Buller indicating his want; and General Buller telegraphed in return to say that as soon as possible four howitzers would be sent.

Sir Redvers Buller himself rode over from Spearman's Camp that day in order to see the position held by Warren, how much ground had been gained, and how the chances of success stood. When he saw the state of affairs, he recommended or ordered that of the howitzers to be sent one pair should be placed upon the right of Woodgate's brigade and one pair upon the left of Hart's brigade, to shell the extremes of that part of the enemy's position.

The infantry had very little to do that day, though they were not entirely idle. At 11 a.m. Woodgate's and Hart's brigades were called up opposite to the new Boer position, and they advanced a little way in open order. As usual, the Dublins

THE DUBLINS RUSHING THE TRENCHES ON SPION KOP.

were in the front ; and seeing an advance trench about 500 yards away, and chock full of Boers, one of them conceived the brilliant idea that the enemy might be some of Blake's brigade—with whom the Dublins had a blood feud. The enquiry buzzed through the ranks. Then someone said, "Let's go and see." So without any waste of their valuable time, the dashing Fusiliers assaulted that trench. They advanced in rushes of half companies across the open ground. If any infantry in the Army could do this kind of work, the Dublin Fusiliers surely could. In the loosest of loose order they rushed in alternate sections, half lying down and firing while the other half rushed in a stooping position across the veldt. So they arrived within about eighty yards of the goal. Then they lay down and blazed away as rapidly as ever they could, emptying their magazines with great rapidity. "We didn't expect to hit anything. We only did it to scare the divils!" This was the explanation of the firing tactics of the Dublin Fusiliers. They wanted to frighten the enemy to such an extent that not one of them would dare to show his head above the trench. And without showing his head no one could fire. Ten minutes of this fierce and rapid shooting, until every rifle was hot as though it had been newly turned out of the furnace, and then a bugle blew.

At the first note a clang of steel on steel sounded loudly over the veldt, giving the Dutchmen warning that the Dublin boys would soon be there. Another note! and 400 lithe and hardy boys spring to their feet and rush with swiftest and deadliest ferocity upon the trench in front of them. Their wild "Hooroo!" takes all the nerve out of the defenders ; and the last volley, which ought to have cut off the head of the Dubliners' loose column, goes wide and high. The Mauser may be a good rifle, but you might as well be armed with a penny popgun unless your nerves are steady and your hand unshaken.

Now is the time of vengeance and of blood. Half our battalion has been struck down by the bullets of these Dutchmen. They murdered us at Colenso. They have made us graves from Dundee to Estcourt. And when our bayonets reach to thrusting distance of them they shall know that the Irishman can fight in a style such as no Dutchman ever dreamed of. The steel! The steel! There is a man who could not fix his bayonet ; so he carried it in his left hand and uses it as a dagger, while his right hand holds his rifle by the barrel, and he deals heavy, sweeping blows whenever he sees a brown beard to smite at. It is soon over. Five minutes, perhaps. It seems at once a moment and an age to those Fusiliers. It is one of those supreme occasions when every nerve is strung almost to breaking point, when every fibre seems to thrill. This is the moment the British infantryman lives for—the glorious moment when he goes in with the bayonet.

Three trenches are rushed in this fashion. But in only one of them are any Boers to be found. They fear the Irish as, perhaps, they fear no other troops, unless it may be the kilted regiments. And having cleared these few advance trenches, the Irishmen are ordered to retire to the position whence they started in the morning. They have had little loss, for a wonder, and are anxious to try to rush the whole of the Boer main position that afternoon. They feel in form, they say. They are almost pathetic in their entreaties to be led to certain death up that open hillside. But if they do not value their own lives, the general does. No one is readier than

General Hart to attack any position, however absurdly dangerous. He himself is a nervous kind of man in manner and small in stature. But he has courage that appeals to the heart of every Irishman of them all. He walks about where bullets are thickest at no more hurried pace than if he were taking a stroll down Piccadilly. He talks to his men in this way: "Go ahead, boys. They can't shoot for nuts. We'll charge them presently, and kill the lot if they don't run." And Pat worships the little general. "'Tis a big man for his inches, he is." That is the verdict.

But the orders of General Warren are as peremptory as they are wise. He will not allow the position to be attacked without adequate searching by shell-fire, which means that until the howitzers come up there will be no forward movement. The troops are under arms all day. Yesterday it rained. To-day the sun broils everything and everybody. It takes the skin off the hands. It seems to burn up the barrels and stocks of the rifles. It is almost unbearable. And the ridge upon which our troops are lying is so steep that to convey water up it is a matter of the very greatest difficulty. In this position the two brigades swelter and scorch the livelong day. Also there are shells and bullets that screech and whistle round them.

They hear firing on the left. It is Hildyard's brigade having a final bout with the reinforcements from Ladysmith. The Boers, trusting to their mobility, have tried to outflank Hildyard. But that general is a soldier at once versed in every scientific theory of warfare and equal to any emergencies which may arise on the field. He has scouts thrown out, who bring him timely warning, whereby he is enabled to throw out the whole battalion of the Devonshire Regiment to meet the flanking movement. The Boers do not mean to face the infantry. As the phrase goes, "They do not press the attack"—in other words, finding there are troops ready to contest their advance, they retire by the way they came, after firing a few desultory shots. The Devons take toll of a few of them. Not many; for Brother Boer is not the kind of man to come near enough to allow one a decent shot at him.

Miles away at Chieveley, General Barton is amusing himself and exercising his Fusiliers by making a demonstration. Moreover, he is doing a little good and rendering some slight assistance to Buller and Warren; because, so long as the enemy see that he is present near Colenso with a considerable force, they dare not deplete their trenches at Colenso and Fort Wylie too much. Thus they are unable to concentrate fully on their right to oppose Sir Charles Warren. But the demonstration ends in a little long-range rifle-firing, and at the end of the day Barton takes his men back to camp none the worse for their day's exercise.

Sunday ended in this fashion. Three or four advanced trenches of the enemy had been rushed by the Dublins, as has been described. Hildyard, on the extreme left, had improved his position there, and had gained two miles of ground. Otherwise no progress.

Monday (January 22nd) was another weary, wearisome day. In the morning the four howitzers arrived from Potgieter's at the camp of Sir Charles Warren. That general was, therefore, able to direct an effective shell-fire on the trenches of the Boers situate upon the plateau in front. The way of performing this operation may be unknown to many, so we will explain how it was done. As has been said already,

the field batteries were unable to reach the enemy by reason of the fact that they could not be placed in position upon the captured ridge.

Much less, then, could the howitzers, being much heavier, be planted there. But these guns were constructed upon principles designed very much for the sort of work about to be described. The four big, dumpy-looking cannon were placed in position on the low ground behind the captured ridge, that being the nearest point possible. Their muzzles were greatly elevated; and they threw their shells over the ridge and on to the grassy slopes and plateau occupied by the enemy. That is to say, the position shelled was entirely shut out of view of the gunners by the ridge occupied by our own infantry; and the lyddite was lobbed over.

To the uninitiated it would appear impossible for our gunners, under the circumstances, to take any sort of aim. Not so, however. For nothing—once learnt—is easier than to calculate the distance and the exact direction of an enemy's trenches: you make a certain allowance for windage—*i.e.* the effect of the wind on the flight of the shell—and the rest is purely mechanical. In this case officers reconnoitring from the top of the captured ridge with range-finding telescopes would see (for example) Boer trenches at a distance of 2,000 yards, in a direction north-east-by-north. A gun would be trained in the requisite direction by setting up stakes, painted white, and telling the gunners to aim so as to get these stakes in line.

That day the four howitzers boomed continually; and from the top of the ridge could be seen the bursting of their shells in the Boer positions. The lyddite threw up great clouds of earth: and sometimes, striking a rock, would scatter the pieces far and wide. For a lyddite shell is made with a pointed steel nozzle, which penetrates whatever it strikes, and then bursts. If it should fall on a rock, or strike a stone wall, it will only penetrate an inch or two before exploding. If, on the other hand, it alights in soft earth or sand, it will drive down so as to bury itself. And in this case little damage is done, because the earth takes away most of the force of the bursting charge.

How much damage was done by the bombardment cannot be told. Probably very little. For shell fire, unless it be the firing of shrapnel at a mass of men in the open, is not very destructive of life. It has a certain moral effect that is far greater than its actual killing power warrants. Our own troops had to undergo shell fire all that day from about eight guns belonging to the enemy, including a "Long Tom," or 94-pound Creusot; and they sustained the bombardment with hardly a casualty. In fact that Monday, the twelfth day of the movement on the left flank, and the sixth day after the crossing of the Tugela, was a day of much cry and little wool.

It may be that General Warren hoped to drive the enemy out of the position in his front by the severity of his cannonade. If he did, he was vastly mistaken in his calculations. There were few troops in the world who could suffer and be still under artillery fire as could the Boers; and fewer who were able to improvise bomb-proof shelters with the facility of these farmers. Moreover, there was amongst the enemy the President of the Free State, Mr. Steyn, a man of great influence with them—a man who could speak to the bold burghers in words that appealed to every fighting instinct within them—he was in the

trenches exhorting Free Staters and Transvaalers to play the man. "We have beaten the English," said he, "in three pitched battles. They have only been victorious in a few skirmishes; and never once when the burghers have shown a bold front and shot steadily. Keep it up. Hold Buller back for a week or two and Ladysmith is ours. And with the fall of Ladysmith either the British will sue for peace, as they did after Majuba, or else the great Powers of Europe will intervene and compel them to desist from the war. Above all, play the man. Remember your fathers who trekked into the wilderness. For their dear and honoured names, for home and country and religion, fight. God is on our side, and He will not fail us."

By language such as this, President Steyn—himself a man of great ability and fair education—exalted the courage of the allies. They no longer doubted their ability to drive the *rooineks* into the sea, and to make of South Africa, from the Zambesi to the Cape, a Federated Dutch South African Republic. Well said the Roman, "whom God wills to destruction his mind He first unhinges"—maddens him with conceit. And the truth contained in the proverb applies equally to men and to nations.

The burghers swore to be steadfast and to drive the English back.

On the night of the 22nd the forces found themselves "as you were"—the British occupying the ridge captured on the 20th by the Irishmen and the Lancastrians, and also Bastion Hill on the extreme left, with some adjoining kopjes. But of real progress there had been none.

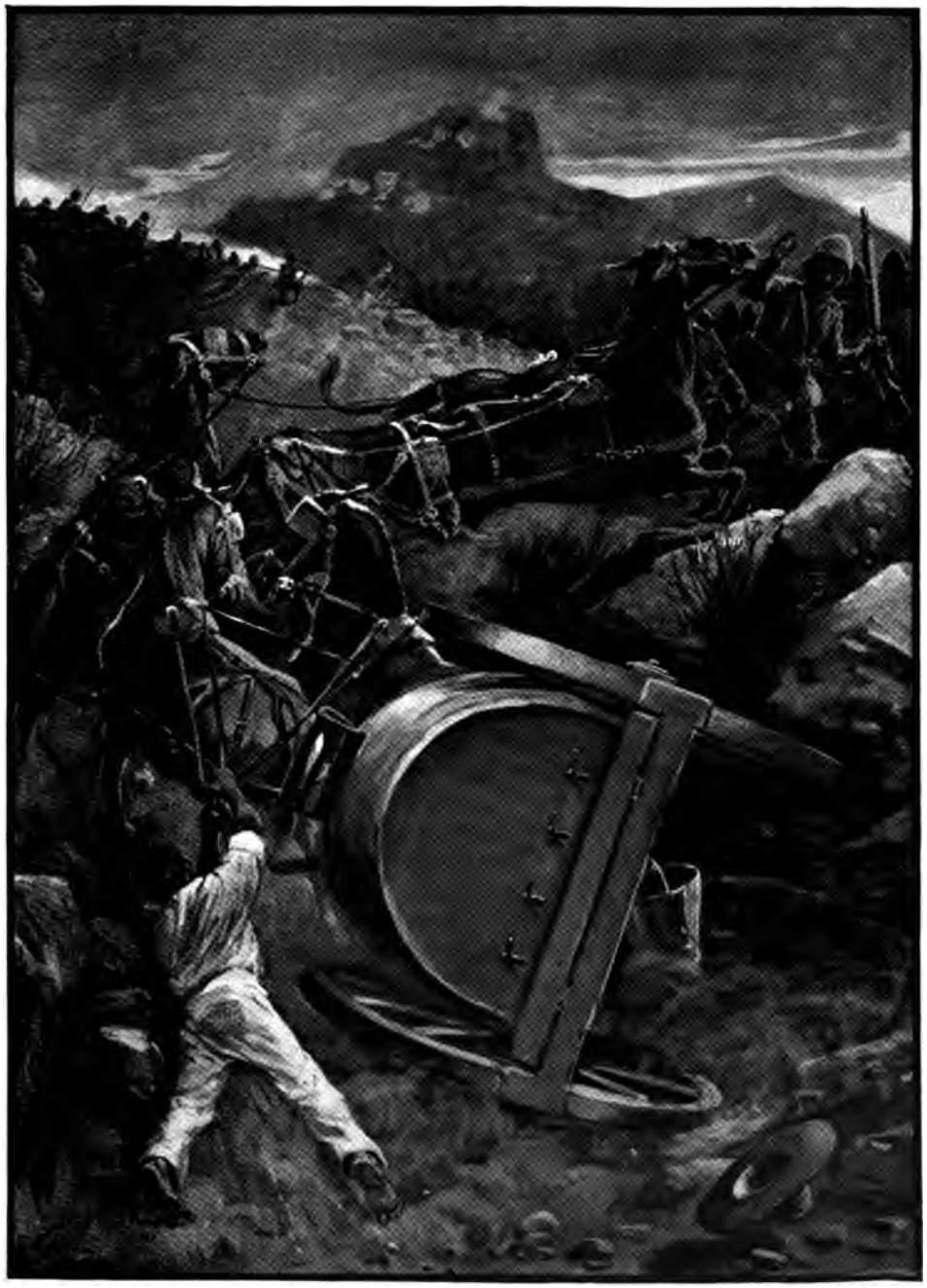
Warren's road lay over the position occupied by the enemy. He had abandoned the wide movement on the extreme left, which the success of the South African Light Horse and Hildyard's brigade had shown to be feasible. The Boers refused to budge an inch, let his howitzers bark never so fiercely. Yet the general hesitated to order an attack by infantry of the strong position in front of him. It would be terribly expensive, without a doubt; and Warren's hesitation was natural.

What was to be done?

On the left of the Boer plateau rose the towering height of Spion Kop, its black head soaring into the clouds. The Boers held this kop, no doubt. But in what force no one knew. Obviously, as this mountain was higher than any other hill in the neighbourhood, possession of it would give to the party holding it the advantage of being able to command the valleys and the lesser hills and ridges round about. In fact, Spion Kop would appear to be the key of the position.

Sir Charles Warren, considering the difficulties of the situation, resolved on a bold stroke. He determined to capture Spion Kop by a *coup de main*, without wasting more time on attacks directed on minor positions. At one blow he would clear the road to Ladysmith.

Having thus resolved, the general had to select the man to undertake the task; and he chose General Coke. That officer, though still suffering from the effects of a broken leg, was more than willing to take the post of honour and of danger; but he had one objection to offer. His orders were to take with him that very night (22nd) a force of infantry, with details of Engineers, and carry the mountain in the dark at point of bayonet. Coke saw General Warren, and suggested that it would be extremely risky to attack at night a position not reconnoitred by day. "Give me to-morrow to reconnoitre the hill,"



AN ACCIDENT TO A WATERCART ON THE WAY UP SPION KOP.

said he, "and put off the attack until to-morrow night."

Coke's advice was, no doubt, sound. There had been quite enough of night attacks not preceded by daylight reconnaissances. Besides, common sense—called by military men "tactics" and "strategy"—tells one that no night attack ought to be delivered—especially in a difficult country—without the ground having been gone over beforehand. And to march up a familiar mountain is bad enough by night, let alone a height whose topography is almost unknown. A dalesman of Westmoreland, for example, might ascend Scafell at midnight—even then with difficulty. But try him on Snowdon after dark, when he has never been there before!

Next day (23rd) the left flank force was still marking time. The Potgeiter's force, which was not supposed to be really fighting at all, did the only piece of work done that day. The naval guns and the remaining howitzer battery got the range of a kopje upon which were many Boers, who sniped the harmless British infantryman as he stood about, smoking his pipe and inquiring of his neighbour, "When the something-or-other are we going to set about 'em?" Upon this kopje the 4·7's threw shell after shell, the great guns swivelling round and planting their lyddite here, there, and everywhere with marvellous rapidity and accuracy, till even a petty officer was heard to express the view that the practice was "not bad." The howitzers followed suit; and after about five hours that kopje became uninhabitable. Through their glasses our officers saw the Boers leaving it, and a half battalion of British infantry was promptly sent ahead to seize it. Which was done. The only advance made that day.

Such was the effect of a concentrated artillery fire. There had been, up to this time, far too little concentration about the fire of our guns: and perhaps that was why it had produced such small results. It was no fault of the Royal Artillery nor of the Naval Brigade. It was rather the mistake of the generals in command. It is certain that for effect three guns concentrated upon a single point of the enemy's position are worth more than nine each of which is firing at a different point.

There was no sign of movement in the direction of Trichardt's. Now, General Buller was not an impatient man. His worst enemy could not say that his acts were characterised by precipitation. Nor did he expect precipitation in his subordinates. But this delay was more than he could stand.

Put yourself in his place. To begin with, when he set out from Frere Camp he had conveyed with infinite difficulty over the bad roads provisions for twenty-one days, and these supplies were to last until the force reached Ladysmith. And they had already been on the march thirteen days, and the really difficult country had still to be crossed. Buller had sent his subordinate, Sir Charles Warren, to make a flanking march. That he expected him to hurry is shown by the fact that he gave him only four days' supplies. And there was Warren, sitting down on the north of the Tugela, having gained about two miles in the last three and a half days.

Wherefore, Sir Redvers Buller mounted his horse and rode from Spearman's Camp to Trichardt's Drift to hold a conversation with the general of division. One is permitted to imagine that the interview was not of the pleasantest. Buller's own account of it is this: "I pointed out to him . . . that for four days he had kept

his men continuously exposed to shell and rifle fire, perched on the edge of an almost precipitous hill; that the position admitted of no second line, and the supports were massed close behind the firing line in indefensible formations, and that a panic or sudden charge might send the whole lot in disorder down the hill at any moment."

A serious indictment.

Now Sir Charles Warren was an old officer, experienced in South African warfare, feared by the Boers, and of the most tried courage. Up to this time he had invariably done well everything he had been called upon by his country to do; and had earned the gratitude of the British element in South Africa by the style in which he had dealt with the Boer aggression in Bechuanaland in 1884–5.

But it is to be feared that on this occasion General Warren had a task beyond his capacity. He held command over 16,000 fighting men—a very considerable force; and it would seem that the enormous mass of administrative work simply overwhelmed him. It was not that he could not fight; nor would it be correct to say that Warren was an incapable man, or a man without ability. On the contrary, he was a "first-class fighting man," and one of considerable capacity and talent. The misfortune was that he had been set to perform a task too great for his strength. With a flying column of 5,000 men we doubt not that Sir Charles Warren would have slipped round the Boer right flank, broken through their lines and relieved Ladysmith by the 20th of January. But with more than thrice that number of men, with thousands of beasts of burden, with hundreds of tons of dead weight to carry with him, the unfortunate officer seemed to be overwhelmed.

Something of the kind seems to have struck Sir Redvers Buller, for he frankly told Warren that the left flanking force could not possibly be allowed to stick in the mud of Trichardt's Drift any longer. It must have been very painful to be obliged to take the course that General Buller felt called upon to take. "I said," he writes, "it was too dangerous a situation to be prolonged, and that he must either attack or I should withdraw his force."

Then it was that Warren told Buller of his resolve to attack Spion Kop by night, and that at that moment General Coke was reconnoitring the position. The attack, Warren said, would no longer be delayed, but would be made that night. With this assurance General Buller was obliged to rest satisfied. He (Buller) was still in favour of an advance from Warren's left; by the way, that is, which the cavalry and Hildyard's brigade were taking. That was the original plan, made after long and careful thought and study. Still, the advance by the left was only a means to an end: and if Sir Charles Warren, experienced soldier that he was, had made up his mind that he could better attain the end by other means, there was little to be said.

There is no doubt that in the light of subsequent events General Buller blamed himself for not taking a stronger line—for not saying plainly to Warren, "I am in command. I have made a plan that I think is adequate. I have devised means that I think the best possible. What you say to me has in no way changed my opinion that the best chance of success lies in carrying out the original scheme. You must carry it out. The responsibility is mine—therefore I insist on having done what I think best to be done." Lord

Roberts afterwards criticised in his despatches "the disinclination of the officer in supreme command to assert his authority."

It is easy to be wise after the event. Let anyone who censures Sir Redvers Buller remember that the subordinate whom he was asked to over-rule was an officer of standing equal to his own—an officer, moreover, who could point to longer South African service.

And so, for better or for worse, the officer in supreme command left the matter in the hands of the divisional commander. He merely advised one alteration in the plan of attack, to wit, that instead of General Coke, who was still lame, the lead should be entrusted to General Woodgate, "who had two sound legs," and was, therefore, "better adapted for mountain climbing." The suggestion commended itself to Warren, and he therefore sent for the brigadier of the Lancashire Brigade and told him of the task to be undertaken. Need we say that Woodgate, being a Briton and a soldier, eagerly embraced the opportunity of heading the stormers?

Buller returned to Spearman's Camp, opposite Potgeiter's, knowing that in a few hours the fate of his movement would be decided. If Warren's desperate game was successful, it would be necessary and advisable to advance in force all along the line—that is, from Lyttelton's brigade on the opposite side of the river, near Potgeiter's, to Hildyard's brigade on Sir Charles Warren's extreme left. He, therefore, telegraphed to Barton at Chieveley to send two Fusilier battalions post-haste to Spearman's Camp, while he sent the three battalions of Coke's brigade and the Imperial Light Infantry (a Colonial force) to Warren

All was ready for the great attempt, and that night (23rd) a small but determined body of troops set out from the British camp near Trichardt's Drift to play the bold game. They were the 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers, the 2nd Royal Lancasters, ninety-four men of Thorneycroft's Horse, and half a company of sappers to assault the position, with two companies 1st Connaught Rangers and the Imperial Light Infantry to act as supports. Woodgate, a fighting man all over, commanded, and he had with him Colonel Thorneycroft, the commanding officer of the irregular regiment bearing his name, an officer who knew the country and had been of the very greatest assistance to the British general during the campaign.

The ninety-four men of Thorneycroft's Horse were picked men, Natalians, selected because of local knowledge and their capacity as scouts. They were the kind of men who had passed many years on the veldt, who could see in the dark, and had "an eye for country"; and their special province in this operation was to guide the column to the top by the easiest route, to crawl ahead and find out where Dutch pickets were, and then to lead the British round them. For the success of Woodgate's men depended chiefly on surprise.

Shortly after midnight the column reached the foot of the mountain. There was a short halt for rest and a biscuit, as well as for the giving of the final orders. Briefly, these were—to march in silence with bayonets fixed; to strike no match; to fire no shot, even if challenged or fired at; but to climb the mountain with all the quickness and secrecy possible, making no sound, striking no blow until the officer commanding should give the word. Then rush and shout and get in with the steel.

Proud of their mission, delighted at

having been selected to strike the decisive blow, the lads of Lancashire, preceded by a fringe of Thorneycroft's men, commenced the ascent of the kop at one a.m. (January 24th). They thought not of the rain that beat upon them, nor of the damp mist that enveloped them, nor of the steepness of the way. They only thought of their comrades who watched and waited for them in the town by the Klip River. And never was night attack better delivered. There were no accidents, no blunders. The tireless Thorneycroft and his keen irregulars led the way with certitude and confidence. It was a winding mountain track, the easiest ascent from the south side—though that is not saying much. And whenever any question arose, as sometimes happened, as to which was the best way to follow, the colonel of irregulars went ahead himself to find out. He led the column round difficult bits, increasing the distance but lessening the journey; and so excellently did he do his part of the work that in two and a half hours the whole column had climbed nearly to the top of a mountain twice as high as Scafell Pike.

Then Thorneycroft told General Woodgate that the road lay straight ahead, and that the first of the Dutchmen's trenches could not be much more than 200 yards in advance. Thorneycroft's men were ordered at once to halt and allow the Lancashire Fusiliers to go to the front—not that the irregulars could not have held their own with the Boers well enough; but they had no bayonets. The Fusiliers knew now that the supreme moment had arrived. They could not see any trace of the enemy, for the mist rendered it impossible to distinguish anything more distant than about twenty-five yards.

Suddenly a voice out of the mist. "*Wie gaat da?*" The Fusiliers gripped tight the stocks of their rifles and marched on steadily. "*Wie gaat da?*" called the Dutch sentry. And he received a reply that must have amazed him. The British soldiers held their breath for a moment.

Then a voice shouted "Waterloo!"

It was the British countersign.

A crackle out of the mist up the mountain. A fierce, vengeful shout down the mountain. And almost as the sound of that hurrah smote the ears of the Boers, they saw piercing the mist a line of bayonets. With haste they fired, but their hands shook and the bullets flew wide and high. Then they fled, as well they might. For there were only about twenty of them in the trench, and the Lancashire lads were no more than a dozen yards away.

Hurrah!

Lieutenant Audrey, a young officer of the Lancashire Fusiliers, a man of giant strength, jumped ahead of the line, to be first in the trench. He was first. And he found there one Boer, who, slower than his companions, had not had time to get clear away. Audrey chased him. The burgher turned and fired. Audrey ran at him with the bayonet, and the steel went through and through; and Audrey shouted "Majuba!" as he thrust, and lifted the Dutchman up as a husbandman picks up a sheaf of corn to toss it in the cart.

Thus was the first blood shed, the first life taken upon Spion Kop.

But the British had only won the first advanced trench. There were others behind. And in them bearded men who meant to make the Englanders pay toll of blood ere the position should be won and lost. These Boers resisted pluckily enough. But they were outnumbered and surprised, and the Lancashire lads were not to be denied.

Many curious things happened at the trenches. A Dutchman fired at Colonel à Court—the range being pistol-shot—and missed. The colonel levelled his revolver, but he had the safety-catch out, to prevent it exploding by accident if he should by chance have fallen down during the climb, and accordingly it failed to go off. The Dutchman tried again. But firing at a man who rushes at you and is only twenty yards away is more trying to the nerves than firing at the same man when he is 600 yards off and you are concealed from his view behind a stone. So the bearded farmer found it. And the next thing he knew was that a jagged rock struck him on the forehead; à Court, dropping his pistol, had betaken himself to David's projectiles, and, thanks to some education on the cricket field, hit his man.

From trench to trench the Fusiliers ran, bayoneting here and there a foe; shouting as they flew at the entrenchments; yelling "Majuba!"; charging straight at everything before them. And the men of Thorneycroft's Horse joined in the fray, dealing now and then a blow with the butt-end or taking a hasty snap-shot at a flying form.

It was quickly over. Twenty minutes of sharp work sufficed. And before four a.m. General Woodgate was able to send a staff officer to Warren with these words—"The position is ours."

And the expense had been trifling. Not a single man had been killed, and only three wounded. Thorneycroft's Horse and the Lancashire lads had reason to be pleased with their night's work. They were.

Photo] [*B. W. Caney, Durban.*

DEVONS WATCHING THE FIGHT FOR SPION KOP FROM THEIR CAMP.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ON SPION KOP.

NO sooner had the Boers been driven from the second trench than the party of Engineers set to work to prepare the ground to be held for the British. They worked hard at the trenches, digging one in advance of the second trench captured from the enemy. And in the captured trenches and the one dug by the Engineers our men took posts.

Dawn had come in the valley, but on the mountain tops there was mist and darkness. No enemy could be seen and no shot was fired ; and the Engineers had to work in the dark, metaphorically as well as literally. The meaning of this is, that they could not see the ground ahead of them or around them, and consequently, the Boers being hid from them, they could not tell in what line or direction to construct their fortifications. This afterwards proved a most serious disadvantage, for when at eight o'clock the mist lifted, it was seen that the trenches occupied by our men formed little or no protection against the attack which the Boers were able to direct upon it.

Let us now see what sort of a position Woodgate's column found itself in at eight o'clock on that morning of the 24th of January. To begin with, the mountain was 7,000 feet high. It had a flat top—one of those enormous plateaus commonly found at the summit of South African hills. This plateau was triangular in shape—not, of course, a mathematical triangle, but three-sided—the corners were at the south-western extreme, the northern, and the north-eastern. The highest point was at the north-western end. The stormers had stopped too soon—100 yards away were trenches, commanding the British position, and lined by Boer riflemen. The ground was shaped very much like a hog's back, and, unfortunately, our sappers had constructed their advanced trenches on that part of the back which sloped down towards the rest of the plateau. In fact, the trenches so constructed were of such little use that our men might almost as well have been lying on the open ground.

We had no artillery, not even a machine gun ; and when General Woodgate saw the position we were in, the first thing he did was to send down Colonel à Court to Sir Charles Warren to ask for reinforcements and artillery. There could be no doubt that once the British could place in position upon the part of the hill captured one or two heavy guns, they could hold it against the world. Further, there was no doubt that Warren had been right when he judged this point to be the key of the Boer position. For it was plain enough to be seen that a force, even a small one, holding the north-western spur of Spion Kop with artillery, could enfilade the Boer trenches on all sides with the greatest ease, and so render their whole position untenable. As a natural consequence it followed that General Botha would have to abandon Brakfontein Ridge, thus leaving open the road from Potgeiter's Drift to

Ladysmith to the uninterrupted advance of Lyttelton's brigade, and the rest of the force under the immediate command of Buller massed round about that drift.

Hardly had the mist rolled away, giving our storming party for the first time a view of the country, than they found themselves exposed to a tremendous fire. The Boers had six guns bearing upon them from three points of the compass—a converging fire directed with the greatest accuracy and the utmost ferocity. There were two Maxim-Nordenfeldts particularly annoying. These lashed the ground with a perfect hail of missiles, sending up earth and dust in clouds, and laying low many a stalwart Lancashire lad. There were two other guns of heavier calibre at the back of the ridge occupied by them on the left—that is, opposite to Warren—and the gunners who manned these pieces were men of skill. They had the range to a nicety, and hardly once did they drop the shell short or pitch it over the mark. Then, from the other side, a Krupp and a 15-pounder hove shrapnel at the spur.

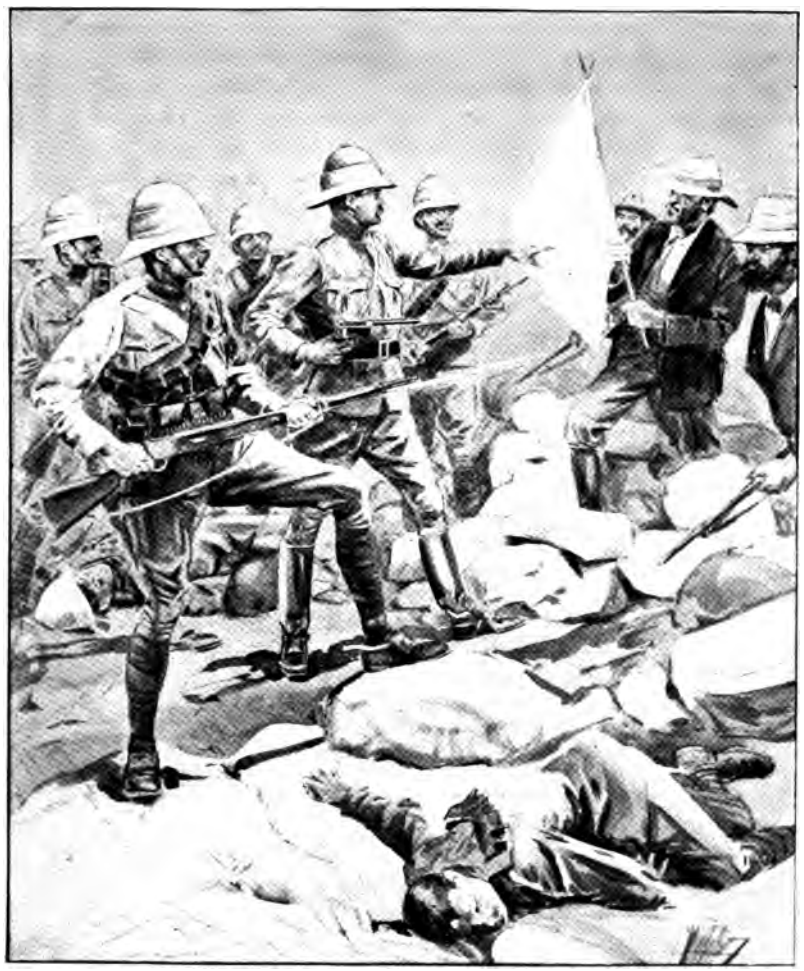
Nor was this all. For simultaneously with the converging artillery fire the Boers began an infantry attack of the deadliest character. They spread themselves out over the plateau and along the hill side in loose order. They hid behind the black rocks as they only could hide, making themselves invisible even at short distances to our men. And they kept up a rifle fire, deadly and concentrated. This was the kind of attack the Dutchmen excelled in. As for advancing over open country it was none of their business. But give them plenty of cover and a hill-side climb and they could attack, perhaps, better than any troops in the world.

At the foot of the mountain to the left Warren had two howitzers placed. He was quite unable until night fell to send guns up the hill, but he tried to reach the Boer artillery so as to silence them and so give some sort of protection to the infantry at the top. He was not very successful, for the simple reason that the howitzers, though they were quite able to carry the distance, could not locate the Boer batteries, which were concealed with the greatest skill; and the result was that Woodgate's infantry was exposed to their fire without the slightest means of replying to it. The only thing that could be done was to take such shelter as the trenches afforded, to reply to the riflemen as well as might be, and to hang on. It may readily be imagined that the British reply to the Boer musketry was not particularly effective when, as has already been said, our poor fellows were quite unable to see the Boer marksmen. Nearer and nearer drew the swarm of sharpshooters. As the moments flew by, and the Dutchmen crept closer and closer, the fire became more and more accurate. It had been close enough before, God knows. By half-past nine it was almost unbearable. Still the Lancastarians and Thorneycroft's men hung on like grim death, determined that the position which had already cost them dear should not be given up while life remained.

At ten o'clock a serious disaster occurred to the British, for at that hour a rifle bullet struck General Woodgate and laid him low. The wound was mortal, and Woodgate knew it. He became almost delirious, and tried to get out of the trench to rush single-handed upon the enemy. And it was only with the greatest difficulty that his men held him back from such suicide. He struggled in their arms, uttering wild cries; and the

command then devolved upon the senior regimental officer who happened to be at the top of the hill. This gentleman was Colonel Crofton of the Royal Lancasters, an officer who had completed his term of command six months before, but had been allowed to continue at the head of his battalion and lead it to the war chiefly because he had had previous experience in South African warfare.

One of the first things done upon capturing the position was to erect a heliographic station, and, as this was necessarily in the open, it came under the full fire of the Boer artillery. The signallers stuck to it pluckily, though their post was one of the greatest danger. There were four of them altogether—Lieutenant Martin of the Royal Lancasters, and Signallers Goodyear of the West Yorks., and Lomax



"'I COMMAND HERE,' SAID HE, 'AND I WILL HAVE NO SURRENDER'" (*p.* 498).

and Turner of the Lancashire Fusiliers. Hardly had they set up their apparatus than a shell pitched on it and wrecked it totally. They set it up again, and the first message they were able to send was from Crofton to Spearman's Hill for transmission to Warren as follows: "Reinforce at once or all lost. General dead." It was impossible to hold communication by signal with Warren direct.

Buller was at the signal station when the message was received. He had been watching from Mount Alice as best he could the progress of events on Spion Kop, and the last thing he had seen before he received the heliogram convinced him that our men there were losing ground. He at once telegraphed to Sir Charles Warren: "Unless you put some really good hard fighting man in command on the top you will lose the hill. I suggest Thorneycroft." Before Warren received this message he had already ordered General Coke to proceed to the top and take command of the force there, but as soon as Buller communicated his wish that Thorneycroft should be placed in command, Warren did as his commander had suggested. So that Coke was in general command of the hill, while Thorneycroft commanded the fighting line on the summit. It was a most extraordinary course—considered in the light of military etiquette—to give the command of the summit to Thorneycroft. For that officer, though no doubt a good hard fighting man and a first-rate leader of irregulars, was only a major, holding the local rank of lieutenant-colonel; and there were many other officers on the hill superior in rank to him. As a matter of fact General Coke did proceed to the top of the mountain, but was almost immediately recalled by Sir Charles Warren, in order that he, Warren, might obtain a report of how matters stood.

Well and hard did Thorneycroft fight that day. He exposed himself to the bullets and shells of the enemy with a gallantry that would be remarkable if it had not been shown by nearly every other man on that corpse-strewn summit. The Boer skirmishers crept closer and closer, emptying their magazines with such deadly effect that the Lancastrians dared not raise themselves above the level of the trenches. Then with a rush the Boers advanced to within thirty yards of the first British line. They covered with the muzzles of their Mausers the Fusiliers who lined the trench; and summoned them to surrender. A Boer with a white flag came right up to the trenches; and many of the men were uncertain as to whether they should or should not surrender when Thorneycroft leaped forward from his position behind. "I command here," said he, "and I will have no surrender." This he shouted at the Boer leader, adding, "You may go to ——!" How Thorneycroft escaped that time is nothing less than miraculous, for he was a big man and was standing up exposed to the aim of, at least, a hundred rifles, the farthest of which was not more than fifty yards away. But he did escape, and he rallied his men. The Boers rushed the trench for the moment; but Thorneycroft shouted "Follow me," and the Lancashire boys, who only wanted an officer to lead, fixed bayonets and hurled themselves at the foe. They lost more than half their number by the way, but at last they got in with the steel; and they made the Boers pay them back in lives at the rate of three for one.

The men were thick on the ground—much too thick, for there was not shelter in the entrenchments for them all, and

before long this disadvantage—and a very serious disadvantage it was—was increased considerably. General Warren, having received the heliogram from Crofton asking for reinforcements, sent up with General Talbot-Coke two new battalions of infantry, so that there were now upon the summit four battalions, or about 3,000 men, where there was only room effectually to manœuvre about 1,000. The reinforcements consisted of the Middlesex, Somerset, and Dorsets, and they reached the top of the hill at about eleven a.m. During the last part of their ascent they were severely shelled by the Boer artillery, especially by the pom-poms. Indeed, the Boer gunners both then and during the day made most excellent practice. The forces at the summit were running short of ammunition, for they had only taken up 100 rounds per man with no reserve supplies, and messengers were being sent down entreating somebody to send up more cartridges.

The fighting was terrible in its closeness, and the Lancashire men dropped one after the other, shot, most of them, through the head. It was a serious misfortune for them that when they first rushed the position there was not only the darkness of the night but also a heavy mist that prevented them from seeing exactly where they were, and this darkness had resulted in the Engineers digging their trenches and the men placing their sangars right on the crest of the kopje. The result was that any man who put his head above the parapet, as he must do to aim, at once showed against the sky-line, and at a distance of never more than 1,500 yards he made an easy target.

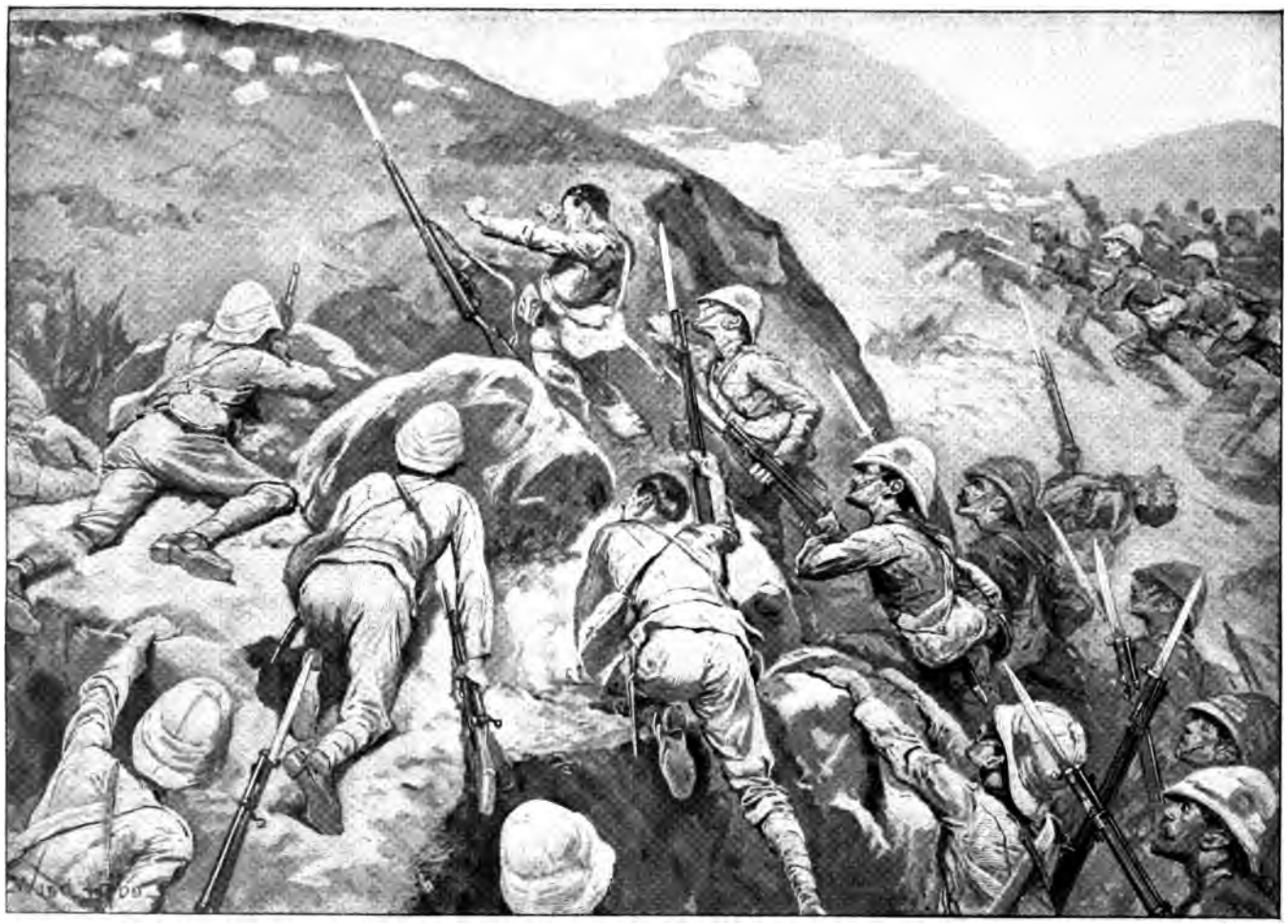
But the Lancashire men were not content altogether to lie down and be shot at. Two or three sections, by whose orders nobody ever knew, tried the plan of rushing along one edge of the plateau in order to get to close quarters with the foe. Nobody but the most valiant would have attempted a feat of this kind, for the little parties were exposed without a vestige of protection to a devastating fire of shell and bullet, and very few of them lived through the storm. There was one half company of the Royal Lancasters that set out upon one of these expeditions thirty-five strong, and by the time the section had progressed 300 yards it had lost eighteen of the thirty-five. But the rest kept on. By this time they had made up their minds that they were to die, and they had resolved to die fighting. A private named Gilmore reached the trench he aimed at with six others. Gilmore took command, halted his men, and fired three volleys at close quarters. Then the seven did a deed the like of which had not been done that day. Gilmore shouted "Fix bayonets!" and, placing himself at the head of his handful of resolute comrades, rushed upon some sixty of the enemy who were ensconced behind a row of piled-up boulders and loose stones. As happens sometimes, the desperate boldness of the thing succeeded, and that handful of men, by sheer thrusting and stabbing, conquered, bayoneting some dozen Dutchmen and driving the rest helter-skelter down the slope. Then Gilmore gathered his men, and the seven of them held that position for the rest of the day. The gallant private was mentioned in despatches, and if every man had his due Gilmore would have been able to write himself "V.C.," but there was no one to report his extraordinary gallantry, and Sir Charles Warren only heard of him as a man in the ranks who had taken charge of a section when all the officers were down.

Other sections there were of equal

bravery, who struggled along the ridge. There is one such party, headed by a young officer, charging along a ridge at a line of sangars. "Down!" and the men fall flat. "At them, my lads!" and they rise and rush onward. Ah! They fall, they fall. Two drop, shot through the head; and another writhes in agony, for a bullet has gone through his bowels. "Follow me, my——!" He's down, that plucky lieutenant; but there is not wanting a sergeant to head the charge.

"Down, lads! Get your breath for the last rush." A volley—now another. And now up and into them. It is a time of blood and of bravery as the men of the Red Rose hurl themselves through the hail of bullets. Most of them are bloody. All of them are tattered; but every man keeps running though his life be trickling from his veins. "Now!" "D——n you! That's for Tom!" And a yellow-haired private lunges his steel through a hairy face. They leap the sangars, those agile sons of the North. They shout as they fall on. Not a brown bayonet but is wet; and then they lie amidst the bodies of the slain, ready to hold the ground they have won. Soon shells burst over them, and deadlier rifle-bullets hum and sing through the air. Near and nearer still there swarm a hundred of Boer skirmishers. What? No more cartridges? Keep one apiece, lads, for a final volley, and then we must trust to the steel. Here they come. They rise from behind the boulders and rush, firing as they come. "Surrender," shouts their leader. "That be damned!" the sergeant replies. "Steady! Fire!" The rifles ring out like one piece. "Up! Charge!" Oh! It is a sight, grand yet terrible, to see those heroes. With one accord they leap to their feet, and with lion-like courage throw themselves upon the enemy. The last volley accounted for a dozen, but the foemen still outnumber the little band by five to one. But they, undaunted, charge in one line. Every bayonet has its red draught. The steel does its bloody work; and fifty women of the Free State may mourn their best-beloved. And so, time after time, the burghers charge, and the ever-lessening band each time dashes out upon them, till at last there is no hand to wield a bayonet. Well may the mothers of Lancashire be proud of their sons.

At about two o'clock in the afternoon the Boer skirmishers again crept up, after their old manner, crawling amongst the boulders, keeping up a terrible fire, so that the defenders dared not show above their parapets, and then rushing. In this way some 400 of them attacked a trench held by what was once a company of the Lancashire Fusiliers and a section of the Middlesex Regiment. They rushed to within a few yards of the trench, pointed their rifles at the heads of its defenders, and shouted "Surrender!" Now there was in that trench no single officer to give a command. Every one of them had been shot. But the men had no thought of yielding. As by instinct the steel flashed out and clashed upon the rifles, and with one cheer the battered men, many of them bleeding, all of them faint with hunger and parched with thirst, threw themselves at the enemy. In ten minutes they had wiped out some of the score. The Mauser bullets flew, and many a brave lad would never see the sun again; but the rest took royal vengeance, and when at last the Dutchmen broke and fled for their lives, they left some fifty ragged corpses at the edge of the entrenchment. So the fight wore on; regiment was mixed with regiment, section with section. Of officers



UP WENT THE 60TH, WITH BAYONETS FIXED (*p.* 503).

there were scarcely any, for, as usual, the men who held commissions exposed themselves freely, and paid the price of their rashness. But Thorneycroft was there, moving from trench to trench, from sangar to sangar, cheerily dealing out words of encouragement to the hardy lads who held the summit. "Reinforcements are coming up," said he. "What, no ammunition! then you must use your bayonets till some more comes; there is more on the way. Come on, my brave lads! there must be no surrender, and we must hold this hill with our fists if need be."

Thorneycroft knew the way to talk to British soldiers. If they were told to hang on, they would hang on so long as a single man had strength to pull a trigger or thrust the steel. Shells were bursting in the entrenchments. Here one drops whole, and the fuse is still burning. A man jumps up, takes in his naked hands the dangerous missile and throws it over the side of the hill, where it rolls for a yard or two and then bursts. The name of that man was Wischhusen, and he was a private in the 2nd Middlesex.

Meanwhile the battle was raging on the lower ground. Directly Buller heard that Spion Kop had been successfully assaulted, he sent word to Lyttelton to advance along the road towards Brakfontein Ridge and engage the enemy there. Lyttelton was encamped with his brigade on a hill called Zwarts Kop, or Black Hill, a little on the right of the road running from Potgeiter's Drift to the north. The brigadier at once set out with the whole of his force and advanced with all speed to the foot of the ridge. He might have assaulted the position successfully, though at great expense; but he had been ordered simply to engage the enemy there and keep him occupied, for, as you will remember, the force at Potgeiter's was intended merely for the purpose of making a feint to cover Warren's movements. Still the brigade of riflemen, though it did not become closely engaged, had a particularly hot day. At about 1,500 yards the men took up position about the veldt, lying behind stones and heaps of anything else that would afford protection, and firing steadily and heavily at the Boers on the ridge. It may have been mistaken policy not to press the attack home. For if the Boers had not been in very great strength, as it seemed possible they were not, Lyttelton's men would have taken the position, and from it would have been able to help Thorneycroft, by enfilading the Boers' position on the lower slopes of Spion Kop. From the same quarter—that is, from Potgeiter's—Buller sent direct help to the men at the top of the hill. He ordered one of the reserve battalions of Lyttelton's Brigade, namely the Scottish Rifles, together with the 3rd King's Royal Rifles, to proceed to the summit of Spion Kop by the northern slopes. These two battalions were to be covered by Bethune's Horse. It was about 4.30 p.m. when these troops advanced. They were not intended to reinforce the men already on the summit so much as to take their places, for Buller rightly judged that the poor fellows who had been on the kop the whole day, foodless and waterless, and exposed to the pitiless fire of the enemy's rifles and cannon, must be by this time almost exhausted.

It was the finest sight of the day to see the advance of these two battalions. Bethune's men spread themselves along the front, scouting and driving in stray Boers who were sniping from behind rocks. After about an hour's march the ascent became so steep that the horsemen

were obliged to dismount and proceed on foot. So steep was it that even on foot they could not climb the face of the hill directly. They had to wind round and take a serpentine path to reach their destination. And when they were within eight hundred yards of the summit they were forced by the steepness of the ground to work round to the same side that the original storming party had ascended by. The confusion was appalling. Warren was doing his best to send up water and ammunition ; and, as it was quite impossible for carts to climb that hill, the water was put in 40lb. biscuit tins and each tin slung between two mules. A long stream of these improvised tanks was painfully struggling up ; bearers with stretchers were trying to walk—some up, some down—the mountain ; men who had been wounded, but were still able to walk, were crawling down, leaving red tracks by the way. And the Boer gunners, knowing perfectly well that in this direction reinforcements and supplies must be on their way, were pitching shells venomously into the straggling mass. And this time the shells burst and scattered death and destruction around them. Here is a mule with its belly ripped open ; there is another with its two forelegs shattered and splintered ; here an ambulance-bearer with both legs blown to pieces ; there a wretched Indian water-bearer bleeding from three wounds, but still, with the stoical patience of his race, urging his mules to the summit ; and there, ghastliest and grimmest sight of all, is a British private carrying his own arm, blood flowing from his shattered shoulder down the khaki.

The confusion was so hopeless that Buller's reinforcements could by no means reach the top of the hill. The mass was so dense that hardly any of the water ever reached the poor wretches who thirsted for it. It was so dense that the ammunition mules could not struggle through, and so for many hours Thorneycroft's men were holding that untenable position with nothing more effective than their bayonets.

Up went the 60th, with bayonets fixed, and they worked round to one side of the ridge. But their steel remained clean. The Boers on that side fled as they saw the men in khaki coming on so wholly together—fled to the main position where their guns protected them.

The day wore on—a day of blood and sweat. Shells burst in the trenches ; Mauser bullets whistled and plashed as they struck the flesh. In one entrenchment the slaughter was so great that the men were lying in rows as though they had been laid out for burial. But they were men of lion heart and they were led by a commander of the supremest courage. To the lads of Lancashire the highest praise must be awarded for their gallantry, but the men of Thorneycroft's Horse, men of Natal, showed a spirit and a courage equal to the bravest. Once or twice it was said by some of the weary soldiers that if no reinforcements came the whole force must surrender. But the Colonials always protested that they would rather die. "Surrender," they said, "means to us imprisonment like felons in Pretoria goal." For it was a melancholy fact that the Boers, though they treated the men of the regular British army whom they captured as well as could have been expected, meted out a different measure to any Colonials who were unfortunate enough to fall into their hands. These they treated as criminals. They intended by their harshness to frighten the British subjects in Cape Colony and Natal, but it had a very

different effect on their fighting spirit. By 6.30 in the evening the fire of the enemy had somewhat subsided. There was still light enough for Talbot-Coke, from the summit, to exchange messages with Warren, at the foot. Warren asked, "Can you keep two battalions on the summit?" Coke replied that he thought he could, at all events he would try. There was now nothing more serious than an intermittent fire from the enemy's rifles and artillery; and a little ammunition having been dragged up to the top, our men were able to reply, or at least a few companies had doled out to them half a dozen cartridges per man.

White and his staff at Ladysmith were viewing the battle afar off. White, like Warren, believed Spion Kop to be the key of the enemy's position. And so, no doubt, it was, if guns could have been placed on the captured summit. And the Ladysmith garrison, seeing that in some way part of the hill had been seized by the Relief Force, perceiving that the Boers had not been successful in driving the

"WHITE AND HIS STAFF . . . WERE VIEWING THE BATTLE AFAR OFF."

British from the position, and, thinking it won, rejoiced. But they could see what Warren could not. They could see the back of the Boer position, and when late in the afternoon they observed the Boer laagers at the back of Spion Kop being broken up and the waggons defiling to the north and east, they concluded that Botha had resolved to abandon the position.

The question was then whether our men could contrive to convey artillery up to the captured position. Remember that it was a very steep climb, even for infantry; but there are those who think that with hard work heavy guns might have been dragged up. There was a long and anxious discussion amongst the staff officers and artillery officers at the foot; and the opinion of most of them seems to have been that it was absolutely impossible for heavy guns to be taken up the mountain. The only person who seemed ready and willing to try to accomplish the task was Lieutenant James, of H.M.S. *Tartar*. The naval man put in an appearance with a 12-pounder; and, when asked what he thought of the practicability of dragging artillery up to the assistance of Woodgate, declared his willingness to try his luck. He believed that he and his men could get the 12-pounder to the top. What would happen when they got there was quite another matter. But the powers that were would not let him try his luck. Whether they were wise or not is a serious question.

Night fell. The two battalions of Lancasters and Lancashire Fusiliers, with the Middlesex and Somerset men, still held the summit of Spion Kop. But they were sadly diminished in numbers. Some 1,300 of them had been struck by shell and bullet, and the rest could hardly keep their eyes open from fatigue. Still they were cheered by the indomitable Thorneycroft, who assured them that water and food and reinforcements were on the way. Unfortunately there were no means of communicating with Sir Charles Warren. For the oil which should have been used by the signallers for their lamps had run out. As for messengers getting through—first of all, it was no easy task for them to find their way down in the dark; second, they had to force a passage through the straggling crowd two-thirds of the way up; and when at last they did reach the foot of the mountain, it was extremely difficult to find anybody who could give an order.

At 9.30 p.m. a messenger arrived with a verbal request from Sir Charles Warren to General Talbot-Coke to proceed to the foot of the hill for purposes of consultation. The general had no option but to obey; and when he went Colonel Thorneycroft was left in sole command. That officer felt himself in desperate straits. No reinforcements had arrived to take the places of his weary men. He had received no intimation whatever that any help was to be sent. For seventeen hours his troops had toiled and fought foodless and waterless, and at last Thorneycroft came to the conclusion that it was impossible for those men to permanently hold the position. Having made up his mind upon this, he acted promptly and with decision, for he immediately gave the order to retire. He could not wait longer, because it would take many hours for him to collect and carry away his wounded and to march his force out of reach of the Boer guns. And, though it might be bad to attempt to hold the summit against a renewed assault, it would be simple suicide to retire from it by daylight under such a concentrated fire as the Boers would be able to mete out to him.

So, acting to the best of his judgment and upon his own responsibility, Thorneycroft evacuated the position. All that night his men, in good order, retired, bearing such of the wounded as they had been able to collect. They passed by the spot where Bethune's troopers and the Scottish and the King's Royal Rifles were lying upon the hill. Tramp, tramp, with slow and weary gait the heroes of that gallant defence filed out of the position they had won so easily and purchased so dearly. Many scores of the brave infantry were still lying upon the summit of that fated mountain—lying with bullet-holes piercing them through and through, with limbs and bodies mangled, and twisted into all sorts of attitudes and positions. These were the men who had died in a hopeless struggle. And their comrades, as they dragged their limbs wearily down the slope, prayed for the day when they should again come face to face with the foe, for the day when Lancashire should dye the Red Rose yet more crimson.

They mourned every man his friend, every man his comrade. There was one rough fellow who was struck down in a rush along the plateau, and his chum, heedless of bullets, went to him to bind up his wounds. "Never mind me, lad," said the stricken one. "Thee get eawt o' this afore tha gets one thysen. I'm done; and yo connot help me."

What think you of the man who, in the throes of an agonising death, could still think of his chum's safety? And what of him who could cross that deadly plateau to bind up a wound?

Women of Loyal Lancashire! Mothers and wives. Though your eyes be dim, let not all your thoughts be mourning. Not yours to rend your hair. Not yours to sorrow for ever.

That bit of crape is as the insignia of merit. Those widow's weeds are as a bridal garment. Lift up your heads. Walk proudly.

For ye are the mothers of heroes, the heritors of an undying fame.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE RETREAT.

SO far, in these pages, no comment has been made on the wisdom or unwisdom of any of the proceedings which led to the evacuation of Spion Kop at Colonel Thorneycroft's order.

There was a great conflict of opinion, not only amongst all members of the public, but amongst the commanders in South Africa, as to the wisdom of the step taken by Colonel Thorneycroft when he ordered his men to evacuate Spion Kop on the night of 24th January. The facts seemed to be that there was practically no communication between Sir Charles Warren at the bottom of the hill and Thorneycroft on the summit. Warren was making some sort of preparation to send guns up to the top of the hill at night, but of this intention he had in no way informed Colonel Thorneycroft. He was also making preparations to send up supplies of food and water, as well as ammunition, all three of which were quite as necessary as artillery. For the men at the summit had been fighting for seventeen hours without bite or sup; and although British infantry, so long as it is actively engaged, can put up with an absence of creature comforts quite as well as most people, yet there are limits to human endurance.

Sir Redvers Buller made severe comments in his official despatch upon the conduct of the divisional commander. "There was," he said, "a want of organisation and system that acted most unfavourably on the defence. If at sundown the defence of the summit had been taken regularly in hand, entrenchments laid out, gun emplacements prepared, the dead removed, the wounded collected, and, in fact, the whole place brought under regular military command, and careful arrangements made for the supply of water and food to the scattered fighting line, the hills would have been held, I am sure.

"But no arrangements were made. General Coke appears to have been ordered away just as he would have been useful, and no one succeeded him; those on the top were ignorant of the fact that guns were coming up, and generally there was a want of organisation and system that acted most unfavourably on the defence."

It is probable that Lord Roberts hit upon the explanation of the muddle when he wrote in his despatch, commenting on the despatch of Sir Redvers Buller:—"It is to be regretted that Sir Charles Warren did not himself visit Spion Kop during the afternoon or evening, knowing as he did that the state of affairs there was very critical, and that the loss of the position would involve the failure of the operations."

It was all very well for Sir Charles Warren to summon General Coke from the summit to make a report as to the state of affairs there; but the old saw which says if you want anything to be well done do it yourself applies as much to warfare as to anything else in human life. One knows how difficult it is for any one

person to make it clear to any other what the exact state of affairs is when that state of affairs happens to be something which can be seen. You may *do* very many things by deputy ; but you must *see* for yourself.

Had Sir Charles Warren thought it his duty to proceed to the top of Spion Kop, he would immediately, with his soldier's eye, have taken in the whole circumstances of the case. He would have seen not only that the state of affairs there was critical, but he would have recognised how critical it was. He would have learned something of the conformation of the ground on the plateau. He would have seen whether or no it was possible to plant guns in position on the summit, and if so, would have been able to give directions as to the best spot for the construction of emplacements. On any question of fortification his opinion and advice would have been invaluable ; for he himself was an Engineer, and a skilful one to boot. More than this, there can be no doubt that his presence would have been useful, as showing the men who were engaged in that desperate struggle that some arrangements would be made to assist and relieve them in holding their hardly won position against the tremendous odds of artillery brought to bear against them.

As to the order given by Colonel Thorneycroft to abandon the hill, there was a considerable difference of opinion as to whether he ought to have done it or not. Sir Redvers Buller officially excused his action. "Preparations for the second day's defence should have been organised during the day, and have been commenced at nightfall. As this was not done I think Colonel Thorneycroft exercised a wise discretion." On the other hand, Lord Roberts differed entirely from General Buller. "I regret that I am unable to concur with Sir Redvers Buller in thinking that Colonel Thorneycroft exercised a wise discretion in ordering the troops to retire. Even admitting that due preparations had not been made for strengthening the position during the night, reorganising the defence, and bringing up artillery—admitting also that the senior officers on the summit of the hill might have been more promptly informed of the measures taken by Sir Charles Warren to support and reinforce them, I am of opinion that Colonel Thorneycroft's assumption of responsibility and authority was wholly inexcusable."

What Colonel Thorneycroft ought to have done, according to Lord Roberts, was to send a messenger to General Coke, or Sir Charles Warren, asking for permission to retire, or for such other orders they might have to give. Because, said Lord Roberts, the fire of the Boers having now altogether abated, not to be resumed until daylight came, Thorneycroft's men could not have incurred any loss during the couple of hours it would have taken for him to communicate by messenger with his superiors. It should be said here that the commander-in-chief in South Africa expressed no opinion as to the feasibility of holding Spion Kop. Of course, he could not ; because he did not know the ground. Sir Charles Warren and Sir Redvers Buller were equally incapable of passing any really valuable opinion on the wisdom of Thorneycroft's action, for they were equally ignorant.

It may be assumed that if the position captured by the British on the kop was tenable at all, then Thorneycroft ought not to have evacuated it. Was it tenable, even with artillery? Sir Charles Warren in his report says that he was making arrangements for sending guns to the top

during the night, but there was an almost unanimous opinion amongst those who had actually been in the position that even if guns had been by superhuman exertions dragged up to the summit, they would immediately have been put out of action by the Boers. This was owing to the configuration of the ground. It may safely be assumed of a man of the conspicuous personal courage of Thorneycroft, a man who sought danger rather than avoided it, that he would not have abandoned a position deemed by his commanders of strategical importance if he had thought it could be held at all.

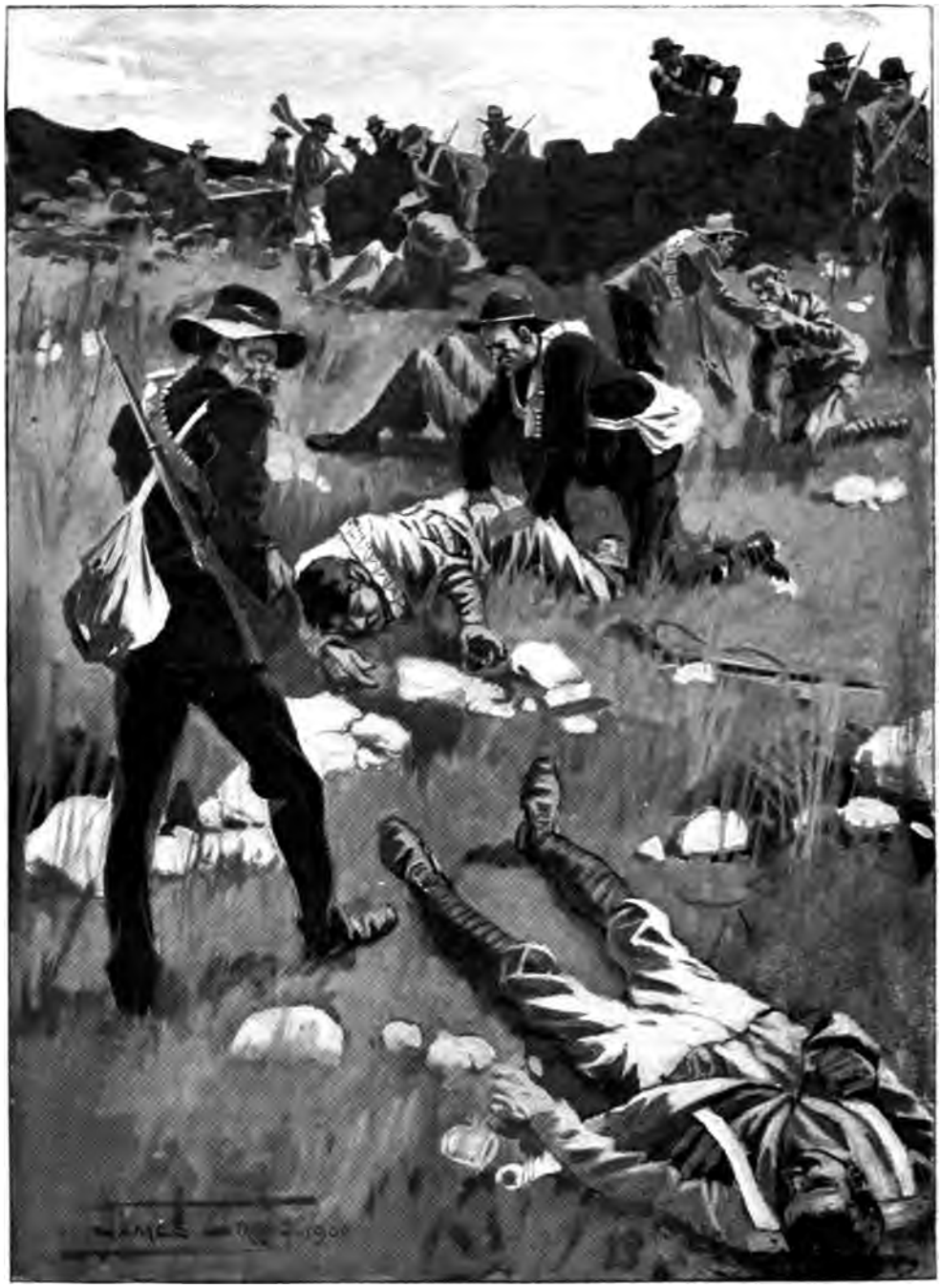
There was a story told of him which illustrates the nature of the man. A certain major in a Line regiment complained to him that the men of Thorneycroft's Horse did not salute him (the major) every time they met him. "Not salute you, eh? Why, they don't salute *me*. But they're the devils to fight!" said Thorneycroft.

What ought to have been done, undoubtedly, was for the troops who had clung to their position so tenaciously all day to deliver a bayonet attack in the dark, and so make themselves masters of the whole top of the mountain. But Thorneycroft had no real idea of the facts of the case. He did not know but that if he secured the top he might not find his position as bad as ever; for he would still have been exposed to the fire of the Boer guns. He was not to know that Botha had given up the game. He only knew that if the Boers held on, and no guns came up to deal with the Dutchmen's artillery, it was simply murder to keep the men up there. Still, it is a thousand pities that the "fighting man" did not adopt a more heroic course.

And there is one other matter to be taken into consideration — something which does not appear in the official despatch, unless, perhaps, it is included in Sir Redvers Buller's comprehensive phrase, "want of organisation and system"—and that is, that it was most difficult for the officers in command on the summit to obtain any orders at all that they could follow. A messenger would be sent to headquarters, and there would probably return two people, or perhaps more, with answers to the message —giving directions generally different and frequently quite contradictory. It was lamentable, it was more than lamentable, that gallant fellows should be sent to storm a steep and high mountain and left to hold it when the task was almost impossible, and that their difficulties should have been increased tenfold by the incompetence of the persons who ought to have been able to render them every assistance.

On the morning of the 25th January Sir Redvers Buller posted from Spearman's Camp to Trichardt's Drift. When he arrived—for the purpose of arranging a plan of action with Warren—he was met by the news, "Spion Kop was abandoned in the night." Buller could hardly believe his ears. Still more incredulous did he grow when he was told that Thorneycroft had abandoned it without orders. And then Sir Redvers Buller took over the command of Warren's force. He was going to do something which must have caused him many a pang, and something that entailed an effort of courage more admirable than military courage. For it was courage of the moral order.

On the setting out of the Relief Force from Frere Camp to Springfield, the general had issued an order, signed by his chief of the staff, Colonel Wynne, of a kind rarely published by a British general.



AFTER THE RETREAT: BOERS ROBBING THE DEAD.

It reminds one rather of an order published by the great Napoleon when he intended to make a supreme effort and was appealing to the devotion of his troops to ensure its success. It ran somewhat in this wise: "The Army is advancing to the relief of Ladysmith, where your comrades have gallantly held out for more than ten weeks in very trying circumstances against a clever and unscrupulous enemy who greatly outnumbers them." After warning the troops to be careful, and especially to be suspicious of the enemy when he showed the white flag, the order went on, "There will be an attempt to mislead our troops by means of false orders, bugle calls sounding 'Cease fire' and 'Retire,' but there is only one order which our generals give, and this, if implicitly and loyally obeyed, must ensure the complete success of our armies. That order is 'Advance.'" Yet within a fortnight the general by whose commands these words were published gave an order to retire! And there is no act in Sir Redvers Buller's career which calls for greater praise than this. He was—and he knew he would be—made the subject of some jeers and sneers by people who said, "This general, whose one order was to be 'Advance,' is now in ignominious retreat." But Buller had one characteristic that endeared him to his countrymen. He tried to do his duty manfully, and he cared nothing of what might be said of him by critics, well or ill informed.

Of course, he knew that he was not in the least to blame for the failure of his advance. He had devised a plan. The plan was scientifically sound and, in the words of Lord Roberts, "it ought to have succeeded." That plan had been shattered, not by the enemy, but by the wilfulness of a divisional commander not chosen by Buller himself, but imposed upon him by the Home Government. This divisional commander had substituted for a carefully devised scheme an immature and crude plan of his own. That plan was strategically sound; but if it had succeeded it would have been pure luck. For the details had not been worked out at all; which was folly. And he had not even shown in the execution of his hare-brained policy common prudence or the ordinary skill to be expected of a general officer.

The result was that at 6 a.m. on the 25th, when Buller arrived at Trichardt's Drift to take over the command of the operations by the left flanking force, he found to his amazement that Spion Kop, which Sir Charles Warren had assured him was the key to the position, the taking of which the same general had informed him had rendered the enemy's position untenable, had now been abandoned by the British and was again in the possession of the Boers. Whereupon General Buller, wasting no time in vain regrets, decided that the left flanking force must re-cross the Tugela, and that the effort to relieve the beleaguered garrison must be made in some other manner and from some other quarter. All that day of the 25th, oxen and waggons and horses defiled over the pontoon bridges from the north side of the river to the south. The troops remained on the north bank until the whole of the transport had crossed over. It was thought most probable that when the Dutchmen found that we were in retreat they would make some effort to harass us during that operation. But, to the surprise and relief of the British, no such attempt was made. There are few instances in warfare where an army that has been repulsed and is

crossing within a few miles, and within full view of a victorious foe, has been allowed to cross such an obstacle as the Tugela River without let or hindrance. But it was so in this case. The Boers sat silent on their hill tops. Not even a round of shrapnel dropped into the long line of ox-drawn waggons. Not a shot was fired as mile after mile of vehicles strung out along the rutty roads.

There was reason for this, and one wonders that it did not at the time strike the experienced British commanders. For the Boers to harass our convoy they must have left their hills to some extent and showed their strength. And the fact is that their line was so thin that they could not afford to show the British how thin it was. They had, while hidden behind their boulders and in their entrenchments, appeared to be quite five times as numerous as they really were ; but once they had come from behind these shelters, it would have become obvious to Sir Charles Warren that the two divisions under his command, numbering nearly 20,000 men, had been held in check for a week by a line of not more than 5,000. The Boer commandoes defending the line of the Tugela were under the leadership of Commandant Botha, a young man of little more than thirty years of age, who until this campaign had had no experience whatever of warfare. And it says a great deal for him, as well as for the troops he commanded, that twice within six weeks he had repulsed, with loss, disciplined troops outnumbering him by three or five to one, and that with scarcely any loss to himself.

Botha had really intended to retreat from the Spion Kop position, and had, in fact, broken up his laager and sent away his waggons during the afternoon and evening of the 24th. He had only left behind a small force of picked sharpshooters and two or three guns to fight a rear-guard action and to delay the British as long as possible. For Botha imagined that the British, having taken one end of the hill by surprise and having held it against enormous odds the whole day, would devote the night to capturing the other end. He expected the morning light to show him line after line of entrenchments, row after row of sangars, and perhaps several gun emplacements, and at least field artillery in position. And he expected that with this force Warren would attack the remaining positions of the mountain and carry them with the bayonet under cover of artillery fire.

So, on the night of the 24th, one whose eyes could pierce the darkness might have seen the extraordinary sight of two armies in retreat from each other. Judge the delighted surprise of the Boer rear-guard when, in the morning, they found the summit of the kop quite empty except for the bodies of the slain. With instant decision Botha recalled his commandoes, and the watchers from the heights of Ladysmith saw to their amazement the long trains of waggons, which had been trekking north in the evening, returning south the next morning. Sir George White could not understand the phenomenon in the least. It never occurred to him that the British had abandoned the hill-top, and he chuckled somewhat when he saw the Boers returning to their old position. He thought in the innocence of his heart that the Dutchmen had returned to make a last stand—to fight the matter out to the finish ; and he doubted not that within twenty-four hours Sir Redvers Buller would grind every Dutchman of them to powder.

It took the commander of the Ladysmith garrison a good many hours to realise that Buller had failed in his second attempt. When White had seen that the summit of Spion Kop was in possession of the British, he had felt so absolutely certain of the success of our arms and the speedy relief of his garrison that he put everybody in Ladysmith on full rations. It was counting chickens before they were hatched with a vengeance, for before the 26th January an order had to be issued cutting down the food allowance to something less than it had been before the Lancashire lads rushed the Boer position.

The British retreat across the Tugela was conducted in a fashion that could only be described as perfect. Sir Redvers Buller knew what a difficult operation it would be. He expected it to be even more difficult than it actually was, for, like everyone else, he supposed that the enemy would seek to harass him in the crossing. So he took charge of all the arrangements himself. He superintended the packing of the waggons, the harnessing of teams, gave directions as to distance to be observed between this waggon and the next, and generally performed—and that with skill—the duties of a transport officer.

CARRYING AWAY THE WOUNDED FROM SPION KOP.

For twenty-four hours there was a rumbling of waggons, bellowing of oxen, a kicking of mules, a snorting of traction engines along the road to the drift across the river and along the banks on the other side. As to the fighting men, both horse and foot, these were kept under arms. For although the army was retreating, the men had not been beaten, and would have been only too glad to come to blows with their elusive enemy. The artillery unlimbered its guns and placed them in position. The battalions deployed and covered the road along which the miles of convoy toiled, the mounted troops stood ready for the "boot and saddle," hoping that the enemy would descend from his hill-tops and try to strike a blow. There was no muddle. You have read how long it took for the waggons to cross the drift on the way to the front. They occupied much less time in traversing a longer distance to the rear, for in thirty-two hours from the time the order was given to retire every bit of the baggage of the 5th Division was on the south bank. The whole of the night the Army Service Corps were hauling and dragging and swearing and thumping the stupid beasts of burden. After the transport had crossed the stream came the cavalry, then the guns, and, last of all, the infantry. While the foot men were filing over, guns were placed on the south bank to cover their retirement. By four a.m. on the 27th all the troops were over, and within four hours after that the pontoons had been packed up on their waggons, and everything and everybody was ready to start for the new camp. This was reached by ten a.m. on the 27th.

One may have some idea of the enormous organisation of the army service when one knows that there were 232 ox-waggons drawn by eight oxen each; ninety-eight waggons drawn by ten mules each; 107 drawn by six mules each, and fifty-two drawn by four; in all 489 waggons. Besides these, there were ambulances and guns, including thirty-six field guns and four howitzers.

It was not until the very last company of infantry was nearly across the pontoon bridge that the Boers made a move. Then half a dozen shells dropped perilously close to the bridge. This was already thin enough, worn by the wheels of so many waggons and the tramp of so many feet, and if the shells had not been much worse aimed than usual, there would have been a very ugly disaster; but for once the British infantry was in luck, and the retreat was accomplished within easy reach of the enemy the whole way without the loss of a single man or beast, or even a pound of stores.

When the retirement occurred it had been impossible, owing to the darkness, to collect all the wounded, much less to bury the dead. Wherefore on Thursday, Friday and Saturday (January 25th, 26th and 27th) parties had to be sent from the British camp to the fatal plateau.

Our medical officers and clergy were much impressed by the conduct of the Boers whom they met on the battle-field. When the British doctors arrived upon the spot they found there before them medical men, Germans and Hollanders and Boers, already engaged in attending the British wounded. The Boers spoke with respect and admiration of the courage of our men. They frankly admitted that they did not expect it—that, indeed, they did not think it possible for men to do what the British infantry had done. They spoke, many of them, of "the un-Christian war," and, to their credit be it said, displayed no signs of undue exultation over their

success. They uncovered reverently when the British chaplain read the burial service over the bodies of their slain, and many even joined in repeating "Our Father."

It was a strange meeting on that mountain. Three or four British clergymen, half a dozen tireless doctors, together with men of the Engineers with the tools of their ghastly business; and there were brown-bearded, grey-headed Dutchmen and solemn Germans, with here and there a Frenchman, all speaking softly and gravely in the presence of so much death. For some of the Boers had spades also. They, too, had come to bury their dead. But there was this difference between the men who lay in the trenches and those who lay upon the edges of them. Everyone of the British had been shot by shell or bullet, while of the Boers who lay there three out of four had been killed with the bayonet. It showed the character of the conflict as well as the methods of fighting of the combatants.

But whether torn by splinter or shell, or riddled by Mauser bullet, or pierced through and through by British steel, they were in the same plight. They had been cut off suddenly. Not slaves driven to battle by kings and emperors to fight in some quarrel regardless of its merits, but men of two free nations, each convinced of the righteousness and justice of its quarrel. There would be mourning in St. Helen's; there would be weeping in Vryheid. Many a Lancashire lass would turn pale as she read the war news. Many a bright-eyed Dutch girl would watch in vain for the familiar face of the youth she loved, would strain her ears to catch the sound of his horse's hoofs across the veldt. Of England's sons two hundred and forty-three found their graves upon Spion Kop; of Dutchmen, of Hollanders, and of the Transvaal foreign legion about half that number. It was a terrible price which the British army had to pay for a series of blunders and procrastinations.

The soldiers knew someone had blundered. Who it was exactly they did not know. But they were still unconquered; still they asked nothing better than to be led against the enemy. Their confidence in their commander had abated not one iota—if anything they adored him the more. For the common soldier is not altogether without understanding; and this time he had seen how, when everything had gone wrong with the left flanking force, Buller had come to take charge at the most critical moment—we mean at the moment of retreat. It is not uncommon for a superior to come in at the last moment, when his juniors have done something creditable, and secure the glory for himself. But Sir Redvers Buller had done precisely the opposite to this. He had appeared on the scene when there was no glory or credit to be gained, but when, on the other hand, a vigorous and determined assault by Botha's men would have resulted in heavy loss, for which he would have to be responsible. Tommy Atkins had seen "Old Bulldog" exposing himself like a young fire-eater near the lost guns at Colenso, and Tommy had admired him for it. But now the troops fairly worshipped their commander. They believed he would peg away until victory came, that he would never cease his efforts until he had broken through to Ladysmith, and they were prepared to follow him anywhere and everywhere at any time and all times. The general's frequent crossing and re-crossing of the Tugela earned him in time among the small and sorry wits of the London clubs

the name of "the ferryman." It would have gone ill with these humorous distributors of cognomens if they had vented their sarcasm in the neighbourhood of Spearman's Camp. Once a rumour flew down the lines that, in consequence of the two failures, the War Office had decided to recall their general. The effect was tremendous. Wrathful privates gathered in groups and spoke angrily together. Some of them asked their officers if there was any truth in the report, and an officer of great experience said that, in his opinion, if the report had been true and General Buller had been recalled or superseded, there would have been something like a mutiny in the army of Natal.

If the army loved and appreciated its general, so also did the general appreciate the ungrudging and unstinted labours of the rank and file. "The men are splendid," he telegraphed to the War Office, after re-crossing the Tugela. And so they were. They had had a ten days' bivouac, most of them, and their food had been the poorest of army rations—bully-beef and biscuit. But they were, nevertheless, in splendid health and in high spirits. They knew that Buller would lead them one day to victory, and were resolved not to be cast down.

IN THE TRENCHES.

But the Devon general, though he was careful not to show it, was sore cast down by his second failure. He had lost all confidence in Warren; and it grieved him much to be obliged to throw his men time and time again at the Boer entrenchments.

CHAPTER XL.

ROBERTS TAKES COMMAND: AND A WORD ON STRATEGY.

ON January 10th, 1900, the campaign assumed a new aspect, for on that day Field-Marshal Lord Roberts landed in Cape Town. The new commander-in-chief was the one man in the army in whom the whole empire had supreme faith. He had a wonderful career, every step of which had brought distinction to himself and success to his country's arms. An Irishman, born in India in the year 1832, Frederick Roberts, entered the Indian army as a subaltern of artillery in 1851. From that time he served the Queen in India for forty-one years, ending his service there as commander-in-chief in India. And what a wonderful forty-one years it was. It counted those days of blood and sweat—the Mutiny—when the Sepoys rose and Delhi fell, when the handful of British troops more than held their own against a whole host, when heroic deeds were everywhere performed, when invincible odds were everywhere overcome. Young Frederick Roberts soon proved himself of the bravest; he won the Victoria Cross by capturing single-handed one of the enemy's standards; and hardly a month had passed before he performed another exploit which would have brought him the cross if he had not already earned it.

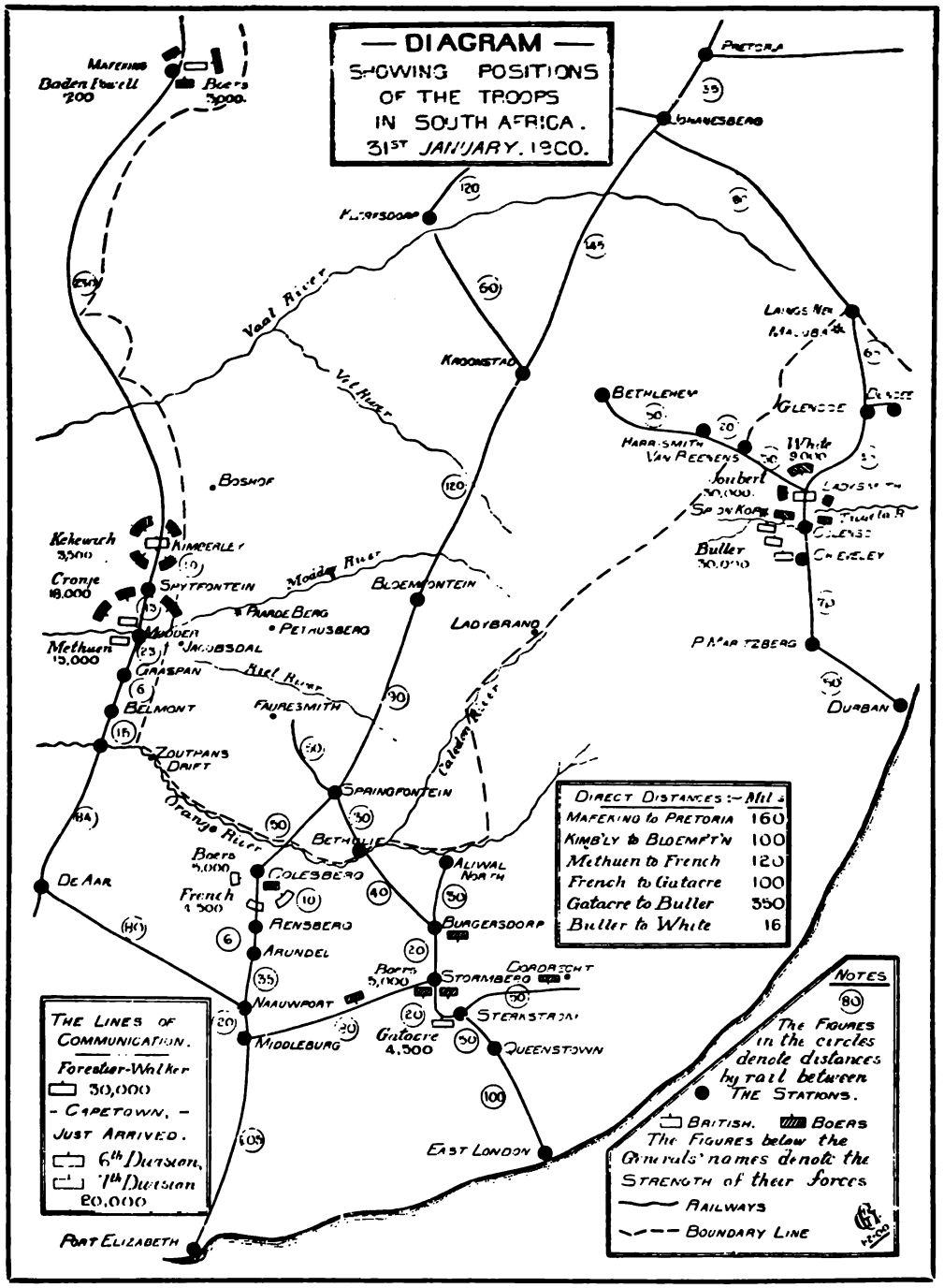
Step by step Frederick Roberts rose in rank; but from the close of the Mutiny until late in the 'seventies he had no opportunity of showing the fighting qualities that he possessed. He tried to obtain whenever it was possible a post that would give him plenty of hard work to do. For he was none of your kid-glove, drawing-room soldiers.

His chance came when Lord Lytton's Indian Government proclaimed war against the Ameer of Afghanistan in the year 1879. Roberts was given command of a division to operate in that mountainous country; and the way in which he out-manœuvred and out-fought the tribesmen in a country absolutely unfavourable to the movements of regular troops stamped him at once as a great commander.

This is not the place to tell of his march to Kandahar, when for three weeks he and his command disappeared from the eye of the world only to reappear at a point 250 miles distant, and to rout the army of Ayoub Khan with splendid completeness; nor is it the place to tell of that still more wonderful march to Cabul and of the fight at Charasiat; nor the hundred-and-one other exploits performed by General Roberts among the rocky fastnesses of Afghanistan.

He was successively created a knight, a baronet, and, finally, Baron Roberts of Kandahar and Waterford.

But the British soldier knew him by none of these names. The British soldier knew him by the endearing appellation of "Bobs," and it is safe to say that never since the days of the famous Marquis of Granby has any British general been so thoroughly beloved by all arms of the service. Not a soldier returning from the


— DIAGRAM —
SHOWING POSITIONS OF THE TROOPS IN SOUTH AFRICA.
31ST JANUARY. 1900.
Mafeking
Baden Powell
200
Boers
3,000.
Pretoria
Johannesburg
Klerksdorp
Vaal River
Vet River
Kroonstad
Lindley
Bethlehem
Glencoe
Harrismith
Van Reenens
White
9,000
Joubert
30,000.
Ladysmith
Colenso
Buller
30,000
Estcourt
Greytown
Pietermaritzburg
Durban
Boshof
Kimberley
Kekewich
3,500
Modder River
Bloemfontein
Cronje
10,000
Smythfontein
Paarde Berg
Petrusberg
Ladybrand
Modder
Methuen
15,000
Jacobsdal
Graspan
Riet River
Belmont
Enslin
Modderspruit
Orange River
Zoutpans Drift
Springfontein
Caledon River
Bethulie
Aliwal North
De Aar
Boers
5,000
Colesberg
French
4,500
Rensberg
Arundel
Burgersdorp
Boers
5,000
Stormberg
Cordrecht
Naauwpoort
Middleburg
Gatacre
4,500
Sterkstroom
Queenstown
East London
Port Elizabeth
The Lines of Communication.
Forester-Walker
30,000
- Capetown, - Just Arrived.
6th Division,
7th Division
20,000
Direct Distances :—
Mafeking to Pretoria 160
Kimb'ly to Bloemf'n 100
Methuen to French 120
French to Gatacre 100
Gatacre to Buller 350
Buller to White 16
Notes
(80) The Figures in the circles denote distances by rail between the Stations.
British. Boers
The Figures below the Generals' names denote the Strength of their forces
Railways
Boundary Line

cantonments of India but had some story to tell of acts of kindness done to him or his friends by "Little Bobs." Lord Roberts knew his Tommy Atkins—knew him from beginning to end, his bad qualities and his good ones, when to appeal to him and how to do it.

After the Afghan campaign the victorious general devoted his energies to various branches of organisation in India, first as commander of the army of Madras and afterwards as commander-in-chief in India. He made the soldiery far more comfortable than it ever had been before, and this without any relaxation of discipline. In fact, during Lord Roberts's reign the British forces in India were more efficient and far better than ever they had been before. In his quiet, persistent style he laboured, accomplishing his reforms without the friction that the reformer generally sets up. He reformed the transport service ; he reformed barrack life ; he improved the musketry of the troops beyond all recognition. Not content with mere drill, he insisted upon every regiment frequently taking part in field manœuvres on an extensive scale.

He became almost fanatical on the musketry question. He was convinced that with the modern rifle, skilful marksmanship gave tremendous advantage to the troops possessing it. Therefore, especially after the Boer War of 1881, he encouraged musketry by every means in his power. He gave, and invited others to give, prizes for competition. And, as example is better than precept, he and his staff officers were themselves often to be seen at the butts. He aimed at making the British soldiery as superior to the rest of the world in musketry as the English long-bowman had been in archery. And in this scheme he had found an able and enthusiastic young coadjutor in Ian Hamilton—now the right hand of White in Ladysmith.

And, in fact, he brought the Indian army, both as regards organisation and *personnel*, up to such a pitch as to make it a magnificent instrument of war. When he came home in 1892, and was made a field-marshal in 1895, it was thought that his period of active service was done. He was sent to the command in chief in Ireland, where he soon became as popular as he had been in the East. Such an incident as the following will show how it was that "Bobs" became and remained the idol of the British soldier. He was one day in Glasgow reviewing the Boys' Brigade, and as his carriage drove to the ground he noticed amongst the crowd who had assembled to gaze upon the hero of Kandahar a middle-aged man with the grizzled moustache and square shoulders of an old soldier. Instantly the carriage was stopped, and the field-marshal looked at the ex-private. The man grew stiff as a ramrod, and brought up his hand to the salute. "You were with me in Afghanistan?" "Yes, sir." "What regiment?" "The 92nd." "Ah! I remember, you were at Cabul." "Yes, sir." "Well, how are you getting on? Plenty of employment?" "Yes, sir, I have got a situation, but they gave me a day's leave to come and see you." "And very glad I am to see you again, and to hear that all is well with you." And the great man held out his hand. The ex-private carefully wiped his own on his jacket before grasping the hand of his old chief ; and as the carriage drove away, and the veteran stiffened once more to the salute, his eyes glistened with pride. "Bobs" had shaken hands with him, and

he would not have changed places with any emperor who ever wore the diadem.

When after the three reverses at Stormberg, Magersfontein, and Colenso, the Council of National Defence decided to send out Lord Roberts to command in South Africa, the veteran field-marshal responded to duty's call in the manner that was to be expected of him. It was a sad time for him. His home had been rendered desolate by the bullet that had struck down his only son, heir to his hard-won honours. He himself was a man attached to his home and family ; he had seen but little of his children. For they had been sent home in early childhood, while he remained in India. He might have looked forward to passing the remainder of his days in dignified ease ; but when the call came, when the Queen, the nation, the Empire said "Go," he straightway set off on his 6,000 miles voyage.

He departed, not amid the thunderous plaudits of the crowd, but amid demonstrations of sympathy and confidence which must have touched him far deeper. Since Horatio Nelson hoisted his flag on the *Victory*, never had warrior left these shores bearing with him more of the love, the hope, and the confidence of the nation.

He had selected as chief of his staff Lord Kitchener, another tried and trusty servant of the Queen ; a man who had conquered not only the hordes of the Soudan, but also the untameable desert itself. It was expected that Lord Kitchener would devote his great powers of organisation to a thorough overhauling and reconstruction of the transport in South Africa. With two such organisers as Roberts and Kitchener, it was felt that there could be no more muddles.

The new commander and his chief of staff reached Cape Town on January the 10th, and it immediately appeared that the campaign was to be conducted upon lines absolutely different from those hitherto employed. Kitchener threw himself into the transport organisation with a vigour amounting almost to ferocity. Never had the Army Service Corps worked as it worked in those days. He wanted mules and waggons. Mules and waggons seemed to rise out of the ground at a wave of his hand. He wanted food and medical stores. They appeared as if by magic. In less than three weeks transport and stores of every necessary kind had been collected, sufficient to enable the army to move anywhere and everywhere, railway or no railway.

It was on the 19th December, 1899, that Lord Roberts and Lord Kitchener were appointed. Four days afterwards the field-marshal sailed from Southampton in the *Dunottar Castle*, while his chief of staff hurried hot-foot from Khartoum, where he was actively employed in administering the newly-conquered province. Without the delay of a single moment, after the receipt of the telegram telling him of his new appointment, Kitchener took train across the Soudan, flew to Cairo, there embarked on one of her Majesty's cruisers, that had been ordered to be ready for him, and hurried across the Mediterranean. At Malta he changed into another cruiser, which was to take him to the Rock. Here he arrived on December 27th. On December 28th, the *Dunottar Castle* put in at Gibraltar, and the chief of staff joined her. It was thirteen days from there to Cape Town, and there can be little doubt that during these thirteen days the old general and his lieutenant settled their plan of operations. The voyage was by no means a pleasure trip for them. They were going out to

pick up the tangled web of a campaign so far disastrous; to encounter an enemy made confident by successes in every part of the theatre of war; to organise victory out of defeat; success out of failure. There were maps to be studied—the geography and the topography of the country to be considered. The strategy of the campaign must be decided on—was it to be conducted on the old lines, or should a new direction be given to the forces of her Majesty in the field? And if so, what new direction? Would it be better to make for Kimberley, advance up the railway line to Vryburg or Mafeking, and then strike across country to Pretoria, or should there be a general advance across the Orange River on Bloemfontein?

On January 10th, 1900, the *Dunottar Castle* arrived at the Cape, and the work of organisation began in earnest. Nobody knew, apparently, what either of the new commanders were doing. To all appearances "Bobs" spent most of his time in visiting the hospitals, while Kitchener shut himself up in a room, where he had occasional visitors. These were mostly men who had to do with railways and mules and food and fodder, and waggons and horses and such like matters; and most of them emerged from the consultations with a scared, unhealthy appearance.

But the work was done, and done with a speed and thoroughness to which the army in South Africa had hitherto been a stranger. My Lord Kitchener was this kind of man. He would order the work of a month to be done in a fortnight or perhaps a week, and if the person whose job it was to carry out his orders protested that he could not accomplish what was wanted in the time given, he was made to understand that it had to be done, and that if he did not do it someone would be found who could. Well had Kitchener been dubbed "the Machine." He was a kind of mill; and ground out work, not only from himself, but from everybody with whom he came in contact. That he was popular cannot be pretended. The service soon dubbed him "the Egyptian." But neither can it be denied that he did the work required of him.

What he actually did in Cape Town during these three weeks was kept scrupulously quiet.

It ought to be said that even on the railway lines in Cape Colony there was not exactly a plethora of means of transport; for as far as the lines running to the Free State were concerned, the greater part of the rolling-stock was on the wrong side of the border. There would have been little remarkable in this, but for the fact that lines and rolling-stock were the property of Cape Colony, and under the control of its Government. Curiously enough, the Cape Minister of Railways actually allowed, on the very eve of hostilities, the Orange Free State to accumulate at Bloemfontein a quantity of rolling-stock far in excess of its legitimate requirements.

The result was, as one can see, that the lines became of very little use to our troops until such time as more engines, trucks, and carriages could be procured. And when one remembers that the facilities in Cape Colony for manufacturing those necessary articles were very small, and that most of the rolling-stock had to be made in Europe, one sees how our generals were hampered by the singular want of foresight, or the negligence—or worse—of the Cape Government. The conduct of that body in this regard was in keeping with their conduct in leaving Kimberley, Mafeking, and the whole of the

Griqualand and Bechuanaland borders unprotected and unfortified.

Lord Kitchener of Khartoum had no easy task. He had to procure railway rolling-stock, to place it in such positions as to make it of the most use. He had to secure mules, horses, and oxen, transport them to depôts, form camps where the horses could be trained as mounts or artillery draught animals, make ready huge quantities of provisions, and arrange for a continuous supply; and have everything prepared so as to be able to throw means of transport, food, and all other necessaries into any spot where they might be required. And he also assisted Lord Roberts in his plan of campaign.

That plan was kept scrupulously quiet in those days; but one thing was certain, and it was that Roberts of Kandahar would treat the obstacles of the theatre of war in a style very different from that manifested up to this time. With the single exception of Buller's left flanking plan for turning the Boer right wing on the Tugela, there had not been in the course of the campaign, or rather campaigns, one single instance of a commander trying, much less succeeding in depriving the enemy of the advantages of a strong position by manœuvring.

There had been plenty of brute force, but very little brains.

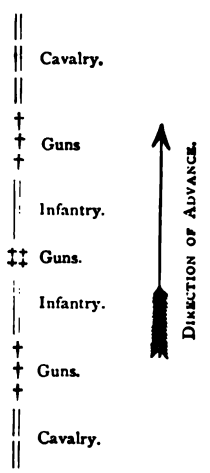
It is elementary military knowledge that an obstacle ought always to be turned or avoided rather than forced. And by an obstacle we mean any feature of the country—such as a river, a swamp, or a range of hills or mountains—which offers special facilities to a defender for obstructing the march of an attacking force. Thus, for an enemy attacking (say) Edinburgh from the north, the Forth would form an obstacle. In an invasion of Spain from the side of France, the Pyrenees form an obstacle.

And the side that is for the time being on the defensive will establish itself on the main passes, roads, or bridges, so that an enemy trying to get through will have to fight at a great disadvantage. Unless a river is fordable anywhere—that is, unless it is so shallow that it can be waded at any point—the army seeking to cross it must do so by a bridge or a ferry, or a single drift or ford. This means that only a few can cross at a time—not as a line, with a wide front spread out for battle, but as a column. The difference between a line and a column is this:—

LINE

Cavalry. Guns. Infantry. Guns. Infantry. Guns. Cavalry.

COLUMN



You see a column, which is the proper formation for a march, consists of men disposed one behind the other, with a width of from four upwards according to the width of the road. In these days a column cannot fight, because (1) only the

"EVERY GRENADIER OF THEM WAS OUT AND SHOUTING" (p. 527).

men in the leading files can fire ; and these are too few to be at all effective. (2) The column's head can be cut up without the rest of the column being able to assist it. (3) In these days a column cannot charge in a mass and break through an enemy's ranks by sheer weight, as Napoleon's columns used to do, because it comes under artillery fire at 10,000 yards (4,500 for field guns), and rifle fire at over 2,000 ; and, moreover, the rifles have magazines and are breech-loading.

And as an army, except in a very flat grass country without hedges, must march along the roads and in column, except so far as it can be sent by rail, and as the column formation is an impossible order for fighting, it follows that an army ought never to be marched straight at an obstacle that lies between it and its objective. Suppose a general has to cross a range of mountains. There are half a dozen passes. The general must gain possession of one of them or else his army is blocked. He will not march straight on one, because it is sure to be fortified ; but he will "demonstrate" against four or five of them, and in the meantime slip a small force, carrying provisions in the men's haversacks, across a mountain so as to attack the rear or flank of one pass and seize it.

With a river it is much the same. An enemy wishing to cross the Thames in face of an army holding the opposite bank would not throw his columns against London Bridge. He would feint to cross there, and at the other principal bridges, but would really send his main body with pontoons up to (say) Marlow, and cross there. That is what Buller had done at the Tugela. He had feinted at Potgeiter's and got across at Trichardt's with his main body, and had failed in his effort to get through to Ladysmith, not by reason of the Tugela, but because of the obstacle presented by the hills behind it.

Now it follows from all this that if an offensive army is bound to go by one route and no other, the task of the defensive general becomes easy. He has only to seize or create (*i.e.* by building a fortress) an obstacle on that route, and he can hold back the attack without fear of his obstacle being "turned" or eluded.

This is precisely what had happened in the case of Methuen's and Gatacre's armies. They had not had sufficient means of other transport to enable them to leave the railway. They were bound to advance along the railway lines by that strongest tie —hunger. Wherefore all that the Boers had to do was to fortify and hold obstacles like the Modder River, Magersfontein, Spytfontein, and Stormberg, directly on the railways, and they could hold the British in check for ever and a day, or else make them risk frontal attacks. The same argument did not hold good with General French to so great an extent, because his country, though difficult, was not quite so full of stumbling-blocks, and his men were mostly mounted. Still even he was fettered by want of means of carrying large quantities of food and other necessary stores, and he had been obliged to hold pretty fast to the railway line for his supplies.

Roberts of Kandahar and Kitchener of Khartoum were strategists ; and they saw almost without looking that so long as this state of affairs continued there could not be success for the British arms, especially against a foe so eminently competent to take advantage of obstacles as the Boer. Hence all this organising of means of transport. It was said that when the American *attaché* saw the fight at Colenso he observed : "Magnificent pluck ! But

isn't there a way round somewhere?" Now that is what Roberts intended to do. He intended to find a way round somewhere; and he and his chief of staff did not intend to start until they had provided themselves with the means of locomotion for making the circuit.

One other thing soon appeared. It became evident that that army was being made mobile, for the new commander-in-chief in South Africa set to work and raised horsemen in all directions. He had, before he went to the front, impressed upon the War Office the fact that he must have mounted troops, and it was upon this demand that the Imperial Yeomanry was raised. Offers of more help had poured in from Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and India; and, when these offers were accepted, instead of the old preference being given to infantry, the Colonies were informed that mounted troops were required. The result was the raising of some of the most magnificent mounted infantry that had ever been seen—men who could ride all day and every day, who could, as one Canadian said, "ride anything with hair on except a porcupine." Men who were equally handy with rifle and revolver; men who were for the most part used to the open life of the back-woods and the prairies—true as steel and hard as nails.

The loyalty of the Canadians, their wishfulness to help in the war, had been shown in a hundred ways. The fact was the more gratifying, because the population of Canada was largely of the old French stock who originally colonised the Lower Provinces; and there had been a time, even in Queen Victoria's reign, when British dominion in Canada had been seriously jeopardised. But, thanks to the wise policy inaugurated by the first Earl of Durham—worthy ancestor of Hedworth Lambton, of the *Powerful*—the peoples of the Dominion, divergent in race and creed as they were, had become contented members of that curious conglomeration of states, nations, and peoples called the British Empire.

When men were wanted for South Africa, the difficulty was not in raising the required number, but in selecting the men to go out of the host of thoroughly eligible recruits who offered themselves. The first contingent was raised readily enough; and we have seen already how the Toronto Company had borne itself in fight. But when a second call was made, and it was proclaimed that mounted men would be sent, the rush for places was tremendous. Men, stalwart and hardy, threw up their employment and journeyed from remotest regions to the recruiting stations. They trooped in in such numbers that the task of selection became daily more difficult. All sorts of tests were imposed in order to obtain the very pick of those who offered, but so many passed the rigorous medical examinations and the high standards as to height, measurement, and ability to ride and shoot, that in the end hundreds of the finest men who ever volunteered for warfare had to be sent away disappointed.

About the same time a wealthy and public-spirited son of the Dominion, Lord Strathcona, offered to raise and equip at his own expense a force of mounted men for service at the front. The Imperial Government readily granted permission, and in a few weeks there was gathered together Strathcona's Horse, a body second to none in the world. Many of its members were men who belonged to the North-West Frontier Police, men whose business it was to preserve order and enforce the law amongst the Red Indians in that distant province, men who practically lived on horseback, who could follow a trail with

a keenness and a certainty denied even to the bloodhound, men whose hands could keep their heads, splendid horsemen, dead shots, to whom bivouacking was no hardship. These hardy fellows were supplemented by troops of cowboys and other inhabitants of the boundless woods and prairies of the North-West; not forgetting a gentleman who, if all tales be true, was the most expert horse-thief of those parts. But his weakness for horseflesh did not prevent him from being patriotic; and he even flattered himself that his talents might not be found useless to his regiment when it was out campaigning. The command was given to Colonel Sam Steele, the chief of the Frontier Police, a man of guile and courage, who could smell an ambuscade a mile off and who knew not the word "fear."

"BOBS."
(*Photo: Robinson & Son, Dublin.*)

Australia, too, produced a *corps d'élite* in the "Bushmen's Corps," recruited from the up-country populations of the Continent. No weedy boys these, either. They could ride as few people in the world can, being perfectly independent of such things as saddles and stirrups. For these were the men who tended and "rounded-up" the great flocks and herds on the rolling plains of Australia—men who thought no more of a 100-mile ride than we islanders think of a two-mile walk. They could be trusted to render a good account of themselves, for they were fighting material such as could not be found in the wide world except where Union Jack and Stars and Stripes float.

Other special corps were raised throughout the Empire, mostly at private cost. There were two corps formed in London—the Sharpshooters and the Roughriders. These, though they had headquarters in the Empire's metropolis, drew recruits from quarters the most distant. There was one man who sold all that he had and journeyed 7,000 miles to join the Roughriders. Then Lord Lovat enlisted a batch of Highland ghillies—deerstalkers —who were known as "Lovat's Scouts." Stalwart fellows these, too. Their occupation taught them the value of cover—taught them how to crawl along in hilly, rocky country, themselves quite invisible. And they could shoot with the best. They went cheerfully to strike a blow for the honour of Scotland. And as for valour —of course they all had that.

Besides all these, Lord Roberts authorised the raising in Cape Town of three new regiments of irregular horse, to be called "Roberts's Horse."

"Kitchener's Horse," and "Brabant's Horse."

Moreover, and this was an instructive commentary on the methods of those who had previously been in charge of the campaign, the new commander mounted all those Colonial troops who had originally been sent as infantry. He himself telegraphed to India, with the result that another fine body of irregular horse, called "Lumsden's Horse," was raised amongst the young planters and other European population of India. On the 21st January, 1900, the first batch of the C.I.V. arrived at Cape Town. They were inspected by the commander-in-chief, who expressed high approval of their appearance, and remarked that the last time a volunteer force left England it was to help the Dutch, and they arrived just in time to save Flushing from the Spaniards. He hoped that under Queen Victoria, as under Queen Elizabeth, the arrival of the Volunteers would coincide with the turn of the tide of the war.

"THE MACHINE."
(Photo: G. Lekegian & Co., Cairo.)

On the 6th of February, 1900, almost exactly six weeks from the day on which he left England, Lord Roberts quietly left Cape Town. His destination was unknown, but it was said officially that he had gone north. "The Machine" had disappeared before that date, no one knew where It had gone, or when, or why.

On the 9th (of February) a man on picket-duty at the Grenadier Guards' camp saw something, which evidently startled him considerably, for it transformed him from a stolid sentry into a roaring, raving maniac. He threw his helmet into the air, waved his rifle wildly, and yelled "It's 'im." In rather less than a minute every Grenadier of them was out and shouting. The contagion spread to the camps of the other battalions, and ere long there was such a deafening noise as the South African veldt had never heard. And the cause of all this most unmilitary excitement was a little white-haired old soldier with keen, kindly blue-grey eyes and thin, alert figure, who smiled on the shouting multitude as a grandfather might smile upon the revels of his children's children. That night the soldiers round the camp fires talked long and earnestly, and the subject of the conversation might be best gathered from the observations of a private of the Grenadiers: "Bobs is 'ere now," said he, "and we shall be at Kimberley in a week; at the Bloomin Fountain in a fortnight; and then the game is hup."

CHAPTER XLI.

CAPE COLONY: GATACRE'S MINOR MOVEMENTS.

AFTER the battle of Stormberg, Gatacre left his men for a few days at Sterkstroom and Putter's Kraal to rest and recuperate. But a man of the superlative energy of Sir William Gatacre could not long remain quiet. In a few days his troops—horse, foot, and artillery—were being exercised in the old fashion.

The force here was sadly depleted both in infantry and artillery by the effects of the 10th of December, and the condition of the artillery horses was such that their ribs could plainly be counted. It seemed vain for the general to attempt to procure any reinforcements—that is, substantial reinforcements—that should make up his force to a division. When the 10th Brigade landed at the Cape he hoped that it would be sent to him; and if so, he expected at last to be able to strike a crushing blow to crush the rebels and to drive the burghers north of the Orange River. But, to the sore disappointment of the general and his army, the 10th Brigade was diverted elsewhere, and only one battalion—the Derbyshires—was sent to Sterkstroom.

Gatacre did, however, receive other reinforcements of a highly useful character. These were some irregular horse raised in the Cape. There were squadrons of the Cape Mounted Rifles, and some of a body of scouts, irregular of irregulars, who became famous in the war as Montmorency's Scouts. Captain de Montmorency was the son of General Viscount Frankfort de Montmorency. Though only a young officer, he had had some experience of war, having served under Kitchener in the Soudan campaign which terminated in the Battle of Omdurman. Everybody has read how at the end of the battle the 21st Lancers—a regiment which had never been in action before—set out in pursuit of the foe; of how they suddenly came upon a body of Dervishes outnumbering them at least by four to one and not in flight, drawn up in order of battle; of how, instead of waiting for the supports to come up, the regiment levelled lance and drew sabre and charged through and through the solid mass of Arabs.

Many distinguished themselves in this daring exploit, but none more than young de Montmorency. After piercing the Dervish ranks, he saw a brother officer, Grenfell, lying wounded and surrounded. Back dashed de Montmorency, drove off the enemy, and lifted Grenfell (now at his last gasp) on his horse. Then, assisted by two comrades who came up, he rejoined his regiment. He was awarded the Victoria Cross. That the young officer was believed to be a soldier of more than ordinary abilities was proved by the fact that he was selected for special service in South Africa—his own regiment was left at home much to its disgust, but Montmorency was sent to the Cape to take charge of a squadron of scouts raised on the spot.

He was an ideal leader of men, a soldier at once daring and cool, with that indispensable eye for country necessary to

the scout. His men would do anything to please "the captain," and men out of the other squadrons and regiments used to volunteer to join his little band. He led them on frays and forays in the most daring fashion. If he had a fault it was of trying to gain by strategy what he might have found it impossible to get by force. And in strategic movements he did not find in his whole column any more zealous or able assistant than the young captain who led the scouts.

HOW DE MONTMORENCY WON HIS V.C. (*p.* 528).

that he was too daring. But if his dash ever carried him into a hot place his resourcefulness could be trusted to extricate him with credit.

Plainly Gatacre could not, with his depleted force, so much as attempt to strike a decisive blow; so he was reduced to the policy of harassing the enemy and

Now there was running from Sterkstroom to a place called Indwe a branch railway about forty miles long, proceeding in a direction almost due east and west. About five miles north of this line was a place called Dordrecht, where the roads from Aliwal North and Barkly East met. The Boers had occupied Dordrecht on the 1st

of December, and at this time it was in possession of a commando about 300 to 400 strong, chiefly of Africander rebels. On the 22nd of December, de Montmorency went out with a patrol about fifty strong to reconnoitre the country about Dordrecht, and about nine miles west of that place he fell in with a party of somewhat less than his own strength, acting as escort to a waggon.

Ten men to the right. Round you go to the rear of that kopje. Ride for all you are worth, because you must be ready to chime in while we attack them in the front. Another ten of you round to the left. The Boers are jogging along quite unsuspectingly, and the first they know of the presence of an enemy is when they see the captain with his main body riding down upon them along the road. They prepare to resist, but just then a scout perceives the right flanking party bearing down on that side. He gives the alarm. Bolt for it! Ride hard! If you stand a moment, retreat will be cut off. Now there is nothing in the world the Dutchman dislikes more than fighting like a rat in the trap, without an obvious avenue of escape. Wherefore, before the flanking parties on right and left can work properly round, the Boers have whipped their horses into a gallop and are riding full speed to Dordrecht. Three of them even forgot to take their rifles; and as for the waggon they did not think of trying to get it away. De Montmorency swoops down upon his prize. He makes also an attempt to pursue the flying foe, but the Dutchmen have all got a start, and the scout is far too good a soldier to attempt a hot pursuit in a country unreconnoitred, where at any time he may come across a strong roving patrol of the enemy.

Sending the loot back under a small escort, the captain spreads his men out in small bodies over the country and reconnoitres to the very gates of Dordrecht, and he finds at a place called Koups Laagte* a force of Boers in laager. They are much too strong for him to attack then and there, but he marks them down as prey, and, returning to camp, obtains permission to take reinforcements and try conclusions with the commando.

Gatacre was at the branch line previously referred to; so that the next day he gave de Montmorency the assistance of an armoured train and reinforcements, bringing up his force to 170 officers and men. Very early in the morning the little column left Sterkstroom in the armoured train and disembarked at a point south of Koups Laagte. De Montmorency followed the tactics pursued in another part of the theatre of war by General French—that is, he perpetually threatened the enemy's flank. He was able to do it because his men were mounted, so that the Boers had no advantage over him in point of mobility. He detached one small party to the right and another to the left to sweep round upon the left and right flanks of the Boer position, while he himself led his main body—numbering about sixty—straight at them. The rebels were on the watch and did not like the looks of the two bodies on their flanks.

Lord Roberts has said, "Always outflank an Asiatic." It would seem that the same maxim applies to the South African Dutchman. For when the Boers saw there was some danger of their retreat being cut off if they should lose in the fight, they promptly evacuated their position, broke up their laager, and moved to some kopjes about two miles in the rear. De Montmorency, with his

* *Laagte* means "valley."

sixty, followed them and exchanged shots at long range; but, as the Boers were at least 300 strong, he could not venture to attack closely. But he sent messages to his flanking bodies, and they repeated against the second position precisely the same manœuvre as against the first. And with the same result, for the Boers promptly evacuated it and retired yet another two miles. From position to position de Montmorency drove them by continual movements on their flanks. Their retreat grew more and more precipitant, and at last, late in the afternoon, they had been driven helter-skelter into Dordrecht.

Having got them on the run, the captain intended to keep them at it. He sent the armoured train back to Sterkstroom, but he himself, with the greater part of his men, bivouacked about two miles from the town upon a line of ridges commanding it. In the train he had sent an officer requesting reinforcements, for he felt that with his small command he could not attack the position held by a body whose strength he did not know.

It seems impossible, incredible, but it is the fact that, instead of reinforcements being sent that night, when a swoop might have been made upon the town while the rebels were in a state of disorganisation, a message was sent to Montmorency telling him that he would have to retire, and that a force would be sent the next morning to cover his retreat.

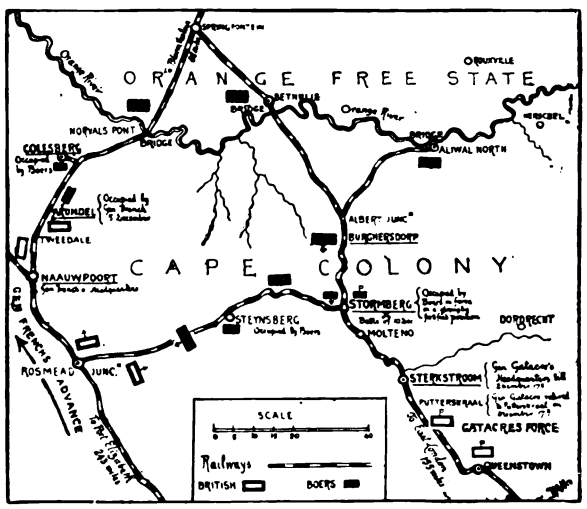
Meanwhile the rebels had made up their minds to evacuate Dordrecht, and they did evacuate it without opposition that night. With reinforcements de Montmorency might have at least inflicted serious loss upon them, and possibly have captured the whole commando and all its stores. As it was, the Cape Mounted Rifles under Colonel Dalgety rode into the town unopposed. Dalgety had been operating with his men from a point much farther up the railway, south-east of Dordrecht; and it is indicative of the want of proper enterprise on the part of the British commander that he had not sent 400 or 500 mounted men to the assistance of de Montmorency, and at the same time given orders for a combined attack from east and west by that officer and Colonel Dalgety. As it was, his mounted troops had done extremely well to capture the town without loss; and there is no doubt that this successful activity on their part had a good moral effect in the rebellious districts.

De Montmorency now established himself at Dordrecht, and was soon again in touch with the enemy. It was Christmas Eve when the town was re-occupied by the British, and Christmas Day was, of course, spent in festivity, but on the 29th the indefatigable scout was out with thirty men scouring the country to find out the position and strength of certain commandoes reported to be in fortified positions on the north and north-east.

The next day, December 30th, the scouts came in touch with the enemy. De Montmorency had taken out a stronger party, and shortly after mid-day he discovered the Boers in position at a place called Labuschagne's Nek, about six miles north of Dordrecht. De Montmorency had about thirty men with him in advance of the main body, and he immediately galloped to the foot of the position, placed his horse in a donga, and began to climb the slopes on the other side of the nek under a heavy rifle fire. He had ordered the main body to take cover in another donga, while a third party was detached to the western outlet of this cleft in the ground, to cover it against any turning

movement. The enemy promptly sent a large party, numbering about 800, to outflank the main body, who found themselves exposed to a furious shell and rifle fire.

Our men could not meet the turning movement, and it seemed at first as if they must be surrounded. Their horses were killed by the cannonade; Lieutenant Warren, of Brabant's Horse was wounded, and at last Lieutenant Milford, who was in command, gave the order to retire with a rush to a kopje close at hand. Carrying their wounded officer, the whole party managed to rush the summit of the hill. They could have got clean away if they had been content to leave Warren to the mercy of the enemy. But they were not content. They declined to consider their own safety at the expense of a wounded comrade, so they lay down behind the boulders of the kopje and prepared to hold out against the odds brought against them.



MAP SHOWING THE OPERATIONS OF GENERALS GATACRE AND FRENCH.

Meanwhile Montmorency, finding the Boers in great strength, outnumbering him by fifty to one, and, moreover, having artillery when he had none, decided that he must retreat. He knew nothing of the position of Milford's men, but sent an order to the whole force to retire gradually. He was told that Milford's men were retiring, and accordingly he himself, with the body under his immediate command, returned to camp.

The little party on the kopje now underwent one of the most exciting experiences of the whole campaign. There were forty of them, and the Boers were close upon 1,000 in number. And, moreover, if there was one thing which the Dutchmen could do better than any other thing, it was to swarm up a rugged position where there was plenty of cover on the hill-side for their skirmishers, keeping all the time a heavy fusilade directed upon the men who held the hill, and picking off anybody who showed himself from behind his cover. These had been their tactics at Majuba, at Laing's Nek, and in all the other battles of the first Transvaal War.

But there was a great difference between those fights and this one, for there they had to deal with regular infantry, unaccustomed to take cover, and unskilful with the rifle. Here they had to deal with men who were trained sportsmen and hunters, men who could also make themselves invisible to the foe, and who could use their rifles with an effect as deadly as the South African Dutchmen themselves. Hour after

hour the fight went on. The British crouched behind their stones, showing nothing but the muzzles of their rifles. The Boers crouched behind the boulders of the slope, also showing nothing but the muzzles of their rifles. But it was necessary for the assailants to advance, and whenever one of them wriggled from behind his sheltering boulder to advance to the cover of another, a rifle from the hill-top spoke, and he was a lucky Boer if the bullet missed its target.

Still, by sheer force of numbers, the assailants gained yard after yard of the hill-side, and now there must be, at least a hundred within fifty yards of the gallant band. Rising from their cover, the Dutchmen rush, firing as they rush. But there will never be another Majuba. Never again will British riflemen run when they see the slouched hats of the burghers rising at their feet. Two withering volleys check the advance. A handful of the most determined stormers still climb on and up. Coolly and steadily the scouts aim and fire. Five Dutchmen fall bleeding on the rocks. The others, daunted, turn and flee, but swift the vengeful bullet flies, and of that bold band not one reaches the foot of the kopje. For an hour there is some sniping, but for the most part our men have peace and quiet.

Then the Dutchmen make up their minds for another try, and, again spread out over the hill-side, they swarm to the attack. They think to wear out the defenders by sheer persistence and force of numbers. But the scouts do not fear them. They know that the Dutchmen cannot take the position so long as rifles are held steadily and fired coolly; and never was any force under the Union Jack more steady and more cool than this little band who held the hill against twenty times their number.

Having failed to capture the position by force, the Boers tried guile—what they call "slimness"; and the dodge was characteristic. The defenders see a party of horsemen drawing towards the position with a large number of Kaffirs in front of them dressed like the British Native Police. Milford thought these were some of the British Irregular Horse with black police guides coming to the relief of the party. As the body approached near, two of the horsemen moved out of the main body and hoisted the white flag. The remainder galloped at full speed to a good position which they had previously, without success, tried to gain possession of. The white flag bearers fell riddled, but the rest of the treacherous party gained the shelter of the coveted position, whence they kept up a fire more effective than any experienced up to that moment.

Our men were glad when night fell. They had held the post pluckily and well for five hours; and sleep and rest would be welcome. Besides, it was more fatiguing than the civilian reader can well understand, to be lying down in the same position hour after hour, not daring to move when once the right attitude had been attained. When night came on, sentries were posted a few yards down the hill with orders to keep eyes and ears well open and to shoot at sight without challenge. The rest wrapped themselves in their cloaks, charged their magazines, and lay down behind the stones to sleep. Every now and then there would be a crackle of musketry from below, and splinters would fly from the rocks. For the Dutchmen hoped by sniping in the night to harass the defenders and keep them perpetually on

the alert, so that they would not be fit for fighting in the morning.

The defenders, on their part, fervently prayed for daylight. They had no manner of doubt that at the earliest possible moment de Montmorency would come to their assistance. The captain would never abandon them; and they had infinite faith in his wit to extract them from their almost hopeless position. Food they had none, and but few of them had any water; but they knew that they must hold that hill for the honour of Britain and the glory of de Montmorency's Scouts. They did not complain, for they had serene confidence that all would be well in the morning.

But Lieutenant Milford, though confident that he would not be deserted by his friends, had not left anything to chance. At midnight he sent out five men singly who were to penetrate through the enemy's lines, make their way to Dordrecht, and inform the British commander there where the force was and the straits it was in. Milford thought it just possible that his superior officers might imagine that he and his party had been captured.

But no such thought had entered the head of de Montmorency and Captain Goldsworthy. When Milford's party did not put in an appearance at Dordrecht in the evening, Goldsworthy came to the conclusion that they had been unable to extricate themselves, and were holding out somewhere on one of the kopjes, and he accordingly applied to headquarters for reinforcements to enable him to go out with the dawn and rescue his comrades. Reinforcements were denied him. He was told it is bad policy to risk a larger force in the attempt to save a smaller one. "If the thirty men who have not returned to camp are captured," said Authority, "it will be a pity, but the loss will not be irreparable. If you care to do it, you may on your own responsibility attempt a rescue with the men you already have." To the credit of Captain Goldsworthy let it be said that he did not shirk the responsibility for one moment, but made arrangements that night to set out first thing in the morning.

Consequently, when Milford's five men arrived at Dordrecht at about five a.m., having all of them successfully crawled through the enemy's line, they were told that a force of 115 Cape Mounted Rifles with two 7-pound guns had already set out for the scene of action. Goldsworthy had gone straight to the kopje where he imagined Milford's party would have taken up their position, and had taken with him a number of led horses. Having reached the end of the valley and attained a plateau where the kopje was situate, Goldsworthy sent de Montmorency and thirty scouts round to the donga where Milford's party had first been, with orders to make a wide detour. These men were determined to penetrate to the position held by their comrades with a supply of ammunition, so as to reinforce them and enable them to hold out to such time as Goldsworthy could get his 7-pounders into action.

Along the valley sweep the scouts, now round the protecting shelter of some rising ground, now skirting a kopje, but always keeping the high ground between themselves and the enemy. This was taking advantage of the country, and it was the only way of getting within striking distance of such an enemy as the Boer. Having reached a spot whence it was necessary to ride across the open to gain the donga which cleft Milford's kopje,

"COOLLY AND STEADILY THE SCOUTS AIM AND FIRE" (*p.* 533).

de Montmorency galloped his men across the open in single file with distances of 300 or 400 yards between the men. He himself led on the beautiful grey Arab which had carried him through the charge of Omdurman ; and his movements took the Boers so much by surprise that three or four of the daring riders had reached the donga before a shot could be fired.

Then the great guns opened upon them, and the rest of the rescuers had to run the gauntlet of a heavy shell fire. The cannonade might have had some disastrous effect upon a solid squadron, but it is not easy to train a gun upon a single horseman galloping at full speed and swerving as he rides. Now all the daring scouts have reached the donga ; they lead their horses to the edge of the cleft in the ground, and then, singly, out of it round the shelter of the kopje to the top, and each man, until his turn comes to mount the hill, lies down in the donga with rifle loaded, ready to resist a rush on the part of the enemy. But no rush is made ; and in a short time Milford's men are drinking the water from the water-bottles of the Scouts and rejoicing in the fact that they are now sixty instead of thirty.

Goldsworthy has been cautiously advancing, the scouts thrown out well ahead and searching the ground for sniping parties. For Goldsworthy has no notion of bringing his guns into action within range of the Boer rifles. Milford's and de Montmorency's men line their kopje for the expected battle. Thirty of them had held the position for sixteen hours ; and with double that number they make not the slightest doubt of their ability to hold it for a week, if need be. When a boom is heard on their left rear and a shell bursts among the Dutchmen, these disappear, as if by magic, behind stones and into holes in the ground. Another shell, and another. Goldsworthy's guns may not be of much account to the modern artilleryman, but there is no question they are well handled by their volunteer gunners. With commendable accuracy and speed they throw shrapnel among the enemy, and Goldsworthy's Cape Mounted Rifles, under cover of the guns, advance at first on horseback and then on foot, under cover of the volleys, towards the position occupied by the Boers.

Every heart beats high. We are only about 150 against something like 1,000 of the enemy. They have great cannon in position on a hill commanding ours. It will be tough work. But tough work is exactly the kind of job that the Cape Mounted Rifles have undertaken to perform. They swarm over the ground, the loose line of skirmishers advancing from boulder to boulder, showing nothing for the foe to fire at, beating the Boer at his own game. And the Boer, unlike the Briton, knows when he is beaten, and, despite the enormous numerical odds in his favour, decides to retire.

It is possible that if Captain Goldsworthy had followed up the enemy, he might have inflicted upon him considerable loss ; but he would only have run the risk of having to meet a still larger body of Boers who might at any time arrive from Stormberg. He had done the work he had set out to accomplish—he had rescued his thirty comrades from the clutches of the enemy, and knowing that he himself could not rely upon any reinforcements from Sterkstroom, decided that he must fall back upon Dordrecht. Besides, Milford's men had four wounded in addition to Lieutenant Warren. And these must be cared for. Wherefore, having made the retreat secure, Goldsworthy issues orders for the evacuation of the position that has been

so gallantly held. And the men return to camp with their wounded. They have undergone an experience that would have tried the nerve of any of the most veteran troops in the world, and they have emerged from the ordeal with honour and with credit. Sad to say, the young officer (Warren) for whose sake they, in the first instance, refused to retire, succumbs to his injuries when the town of Dordrecht is reached, but he dies surrounded by friends and comrades, and is buried under the Union Jack.

As for the Boers, they had sustained loss far more serious, in addition to the discredit of being held at bay by a force whom they outnumbered by nearly thirty to one. Thirty-three of their horses were found dead round the position ; Swanelef, a commandant, was wounded mortally ; and more than a dozen were killed in a single rush.

Skirmishing continued round Dordrecht. On the railway line between Molteno and Sterkstroom there is a small unimportant place called Cyphergat, which is a little place existing only from the fact that there is a coal-mine there. North of Cyphergat and on the right of the line looking north are a number of hills, some of quite a respectable height, and others small kopjes which look as though they had been dumped down of a heap. On the same side of the line, but a little further north, is a high hill called Bushman's Hoek. And directly north is another mountain called Loperberg. Loperberg commands Cyphergat from the north-east and Bushman's Hoek from the south-east. Between Molteno and Cyphergat there was a camp of the Cape Mounted Police, which was placed there to protect the railway line and to act as a sort of outwork for Bushman's Hoek. On the latter mountain was a considerable British garrison.

The Boers had confined themselves so strictly to the defensive, refusing under any inducement to come out into the open and fight, that General Gatacre was highly astonished when he heard on January 3rd that a strong commando of about 3,000 had advanced from Stormberg, left Molteno on the right, cut off and surrounded the Police Camp, occupied Loperberg, and appeared to have some intention of attacking Bushman's Hoek.

This was good news. If the enemy would only come out and fight like Christians, there was some hope of the war being brought to an end before Doomsday. Gatacre had not enough troops to attack them and drive them out ; and if they would only advance upon him and attempt to drive him out, he would say as Cromwell said at Dunbar, "The Lord hath delivered them into our hands." So the general set out for Bushman's Hoek with all speed, taking with him all the Colonial mounted forces in camp, a battalion of Royal Scots, and the 70th Field Battery.

On the mountain there was already a garrison, consisting of the remnant of the Irish Rifles, the Mounted Infantry, a section of the Berkshires, the Kaffrarian Mounted Infantry, and the Frontier Mounted Rifles. The outpost that had been cut off consisted of a mere handful of Kaffrarian Mounted Rifles and Cape Mounted Police. They had no warning whatever of the approach of the Boers until they perceived themselves cut off from their own main body.

By all the rules of war the outpost—numbering about half a hundred men without guns—ought to have surrendered upon being attacked by 3,000 men with heavy artillery, including two

15-pound field guns. But we are bound to say that the Colonial troops did not fight according to the rules of war. They fought according to a sort of rule-of-thumb of their own, of which the guiding principles were: Take as much cover as you can: keep cool: take steady aim; and whenever you see a Boer, shoot him. The Colonial irregulars argue thus:—What is the earthly use of being a Briton if you are going to surrender to a crowd of South African Dutchmen. The Dutchmen may outnumber you by several hundreds to one; but that is only a greater reason for the Briton to fight hard and to sell his life dearly.

Wherefore the outpost spread itself out over its ridiculous little kopje, and when attacked by the Boer sharpshooters, replied as coolly and as steadily as though the numbers on both sides had been equal.

Dame Fortune would not be feminine if she did not love men who played a desperate game. Certainly she favoured the handful against the host, for of all the scores of shells that burst upon that kopje, of all the hundreds of bullets that whistled through the air, not a single one did the slightest amount of harm to any member of the tiny garrison.

Disappointed and baulked of their prey, the Boers left about 500 men to continue an assault on the outpost, and marched with their main body to Loperberg. Their 94-pounder gun arrived from Stormberg, drawn by teams of horses; and it took up the tale, casting its gigantic projectiles upon the slopes and summit of Bushman's Hoek. The garrison there had no artillery better than the miserable 7-pounders supplied to Colonial regiments years ago by a paternal and economical Government. They might as well on this occasion have had nothing at all, for the 7-pounders could not drop their shells within a mile and a half of the enemy's guns.

Gatacre, with his reinforcements, came up in the armoured train, but at first brought no artillery with him. That arm came by road with the mounted troops, and the condition of the horses was such that the field battery did not arrive at Bushman's Hoek until late in the afternoon. The isolated outpost was bearing itself bravely. The Boers, as they are wont, crawled up the side of the kopje between and round the boulders with great skill, but the Police and the Kaffrarian Rifles could shoot, and a slouch hat appearing from behind a rock was instantly pierced by a British bullet. Great was the execution.

Three Dutchmen had managed to attain a somewhat commanding but rather exposed position close to the line of the outpost. These were promptly shot; and, according to custom, their brethren came in trying to carry away the bodies. One, two, three fell shot through the head, and after that not a single Boer of them all would risk his life in that exposed spot. For five hours the little band held on, and then they saw a welcome sight that made them open their throats as Englishmen will. It was a man on a grey horse galloping past the Boer position at topmost speed. And behind him, at a distance of about 400 yards, came another daring rider, and behind him, at the same distance, another. It could only be de Montmorency and his scouts.

Rifle cracked and cannon boomed at the horsemen as they dashed across the open, but neither man nor horse was touched; and so it was that thirty of them ran the gauntlet and soon were lying down side by side with the men who held the post. This was the daring kind of work

that suited the young cavalryman and his followers—something with more than a little risk in it. But it was calculated risk ; not a mere blind, blundering, running into danger.

At about two o'clock the artillery arrived, and was soon in action against the Loperberg. The Boers replied with their great guns for some time, though without effect. And the fire of their riflemen was quelled by the shrapnel of the British battery. They may have meant to make an attack upon Bushman's Hoek. If they had, they had waited rather too long. They had hesitated when the Hoek was only held by a small garrison—now there were reinforcements and efficient artillery, and for the Boers a successful attack had become impossible.

It seemed, indeed, as if the attacking would be done by our men instead ; for the Loperberg, though a mountain of considerable height, was not one presenting any great difficulty to a force such as Sir William Gatacre had under his command. The Colonials could have ridden most of the way up it ; and then they, with the infantry, covered by the field battery, might have delivered such an attack as would have been some blow to the Boer strength. But Sir William Gatacre had become cautious. He hesitated now about attacking the enemy when they held a strong position, though Loperberg was of nothing like the strength of Stormberg.

In the valley between Loperberg and Bushman's Hoek, about two miles wide, were two or three farmhouses ; and our men moved towards these to take possession of them as a position for our artillery. As the Royal Scots and the gunners moved across the open ground they were shelled persistently, and it was a wonder that scores of them did not fall. Doubtless they would have suffered heavy loss if they had not been marching in very loose order. As it was they did not suffer a scratch, though the shells burst well. Unless men are in masses, it is always more or less of an accident when a man is hurt as the result of shell-fire. To shell when the unit is a single man is as if one should throw a cricket-ball at a fly. Only when troops are in column or clustered round a gun, or spread thickly in a trench, can shell-fire be trusted to be effectual. Thus the 70th Battery, with its escort, reached the shelter of a farmhouse without loss or injury. "Unlimber." The guns and limbers fall apart in a moment, the guns are loaded, and one after the other pitch their shells on the upper slopes and summit of the enemy's position. Three rounds are fired, and then the enemy have had quite enough of it. Their big cannon ceased to bark, and the whole force which marched out with intent to cut off the Police outpost and capture Bushman's Hoek turns on its heel and travels swiftly back to Stormberg.

Now old Back-acher! Now is your time to take revenge for that Sunday morning three weeks ago when the Dutchman shelled you from Stormberg to Molteno—now is your time to move swiftly upon him, to throw the Royal Scots upon his rear in bayonet line, to put your mounted Colonials to their utmost speed that they may ride round Loperberg and fall upon his flanks as he descends upon the other side, to limber up your battery and pursue him, to mete out to him the measure he meted out to you—a retreat under shell fire. But Sir William Gatacre had grown cautious. He feared a trap. He knew that the Boers sometimes retreated in order to draw the foe into an

MOUNTED INFANTRY IN ACTION.

ambush. So he ordered his men to bivouac on the ground, trusting that the enemy would come out the next day and fall upon him. Meanwhile he sent a new supply of ammunition to the outpost on the kopje ; they needed it badly enough, for they had only about two cartridges apiece left when the Boers bolted. Another hour of it, and they might well have been obliged to surrender—not from fear or from any other reason except want of cartridges.

That night the force slept on the veldt. Nobody was particularly pleased with himself except the members of the outpost. They had had practically all the fighting to themselves. Six Boers with holes neatly drilled through their heads lay there as a sign and a witness that the Cape Police could shoot, and that the Kaffrarian Rifles knew how to handle their favourite weapon. There had been others whose bodies were taken up and carried away by their comrades—carried away in waggons to the laager at Stormberg, where sturdy, big-boned women straightened their limbs and laid them out for burial.

The Stormberg commando had not suffered so heavily as it might have done, or as it ought to have done. But it had received a check of a character almost disgraceful. For after isolating a position defended by no more than a mere handful of men, it had been repulsed from that position with heavy loss.

Thus twice within a week had half a hundred or less of British Infantry Colonials held their own against enormous odds, proving, if it needed any proof, that a few marksmen in a favourable position can and ought to hold it, quite regardless of the numbers brought against them. It was, in fact, exactly what the Boers themselves had been doing at Colenso and at Magersfontein.

There was no further fighting for Gatacre's men this time. The attack expected in the morning was never delivered, as might have been expected. But Sir William Gatacre came to the conclusion that Dordrecht was not worth the trouble of holding. With his small force, it was quite as much as he could do to hold Sterkstroom and the main line of railway, together with the branch line to Indwe. He could not afford to spread his troops all over the country, where they were liable at any time to be swooped down upon by overwhelming numbers. Wherefore, on January 4th, Dordrecht was again evacuated. Four days later the general decided upon a reconnaissance in force towards Stormberg. He had two objects —one being to clear a large quantity of flour and grain out of Molteno ; and the other to endeavour to lure the Boers out of their stronghold to fight him.

The Derbyshire Battalion went up in the armoured train to the little town and loaded up 3,000 bags of flour from a mill there, what time the 79th Field Battery and several squadrons of Mounted Colonials set off by road from Bushman's Hoek to the same destination. The battery and the mounted men went on ahead towards Stormberg, while the Derbyshires were doing the donkey work at Molteno ; and they manœuvred up to the Stormberg position, trying to draw the enemy out a little to fight. But the wily Dutchman refused to be drawn. He preferred his enemy to come to him ; and he had no notion whatever of going to seek trouble. And so the reconnoitring force was obliged to camp at Sterkstroom without a smell of a fight, very much to its disgust.

After this the days went by in mono-

tonous style. Not that the force was idle by any means—that would have been impossible in any camp where Sir William Gatacre was in command. But there was no fighting to speak of. The general was getting his men into condition, as his manner was, by continual and continuous field days and sham fights and every other kind of device laid down by the drill-book. Whether these operations did any good to anybody except the army contractor who supplied the boots for the infantry, is very much a matter of opinion.

Undeniably useful work, however, was performed by the mounted troops, regular and irregular. The mounted infantry of the Berkshires, de Montmorency's Scouts, the Kaffrarian Rifles, Brabant's Horse, and the others of those who could cover miles of country without fatigue, went out daily in small parties. Sometimes there was a brush with the enemy. Very often the Boer patrols made off when they encountered a patrol of the British. This may be accounted for by, amongst others, the fact that the Stormberg commando contained a very large number of rebels, every one of whom dreaded capture.

And for this reason they never stopped to fight when there was the remotest chance of their retreat being intercepted. They hardly dared come within shot, for fear their horses should be killed and themselves overtaken. As a matter of fact, General Gatacre treated these rebellious children of the Queen in a manner much too lenient for their deserts, but somehow he had obtained the reputation of being a hard man, and the farmers who had risen to join the burghers of the allied Republics dreaded falling into his hands more than they feared any other thing.

The scouts did their work efficiently and well, and the result was that in time General Gatacre had reliable information at his disposal as to the character and configuration of the country and the disposal of the Boer force thereon. He yearned to move and make another attack, being confident that if he could inflict one fairly severe defeat upon the commando at Stormberg the country for miles around would be pacified, and scores of farmers would desert the standard of rebellion. But he could not move, he had not men enough to attempt a flanking movement, for that must of necessity mean retaining a sufficient force at Sterkstroom to guard his line of communications against a counter attack by the enemy. Sir William Gatacre may have made, and possibly did make, many mistakes in his command; but it must not be forgotten that he was starved for men and materials, and was blamed alternately for attempting too much and accomplishing too little.

The whole of January the force at Sterkstroom was waiting orders to strike, and for reinforcements to enable it to do so when the order came.

CHAPTER XLII.

WITH FRENCH: FIGHTING AND MANŒUVRING.

THE disaster to the Suffolks on Grassy Hill, though lamentable, was not enough to quell the energy of General French. If he could have taken that position he would have rendered the enemy's Colesberg position untenable, but, as the homely proverb says, there are more ways than one of killing a cat. And the Silent Cavalryman, not being able to oust his enemy by direct attack, prepared by other methods to make the position too hot to hold him. Briefly, these were to manœuvre round to his right and left, and at the auspicious moment to break his line of communications and cut him off from the Free State. He thought it probable that if the Boers saw their communications and line of retreat seriously menaced they would evacuate Colesberg with little or no fighting.

To this intent French spread out his division so as to form a kind of horse-shoe round Colesberg. The opening of the horse-shoe was on the north, and French's intention was gradually to bring the two ends together.

He had already gained possession of Colesberg Kopje, a steep, almost perpendicular, hill quite close to Grassy Hill; and from the 4th of January to the 11th this height was held by the Berkshire regiment. The enemy played upon it with artillery, and directed a sniping rifle fire at our men continually. The Berkshires, however, were exceedingly well officered, and were themselves seasoned to the climate and well used to the country. So they constructed breastworks of loose stones, and even shanties roofed over so as to form shelters proof against both bullet and shell. They bivouacked there for a week, cheerfully and without complaint, until, on the 11th January, an artillery officer suggested that gun emplacements could by hard labour be constructed upon the summit, and the sappers volunteered to carry a couple of field guns up. This was done, and in order to save the labour of dragging ammunition up on the backs of mules, the Engineers constructed a wire hoist. From that time our artillery was able to direct a heavy shell fire both on Grassy Hill and several other positions near the town, thus rendering the position of the Berkshires very much more comfortable.

Porter, the colonel of the 6th Dragoons, who was acting practically as a brigadier, was encamped with two regiments of cavalry, some Horse Artillery and details at Slinger's Farm, sometimes called Slingersfontein. This was a place on the south-east of Colesberg, and the general resolved to send Porter to menace the enemy's communications, and to find out his strength to the north. The plan of action was that the cavalry and guns should feign an attack in the front, whilst Major Hunter-Weston, R.E., who was in command of the sappers of the division, should make a wide sweep, try to get round to the enemy's rear and

cut the telegraph wires. We shall hear about this officer and his useful habit of cutting lines of communication at a later date. This time he was to take with him a small detachment of cavalry as escort, and make a dash for the telegraph—a job, the mere prospect of which gave him exceeding great delight.

At 5 a.m. French led Porter's force out of Slingersfontein in a northerly direction. Hunter-Weston had set out with his escort two or three hours before. The guns of a whole battery of Horse Artillery trotted out of the camp on right and left. The Household Cavalry were sent on the left flank, while the New Zealanders and the Carabiniers acted on the right and centre. The Household Cavalry manœuvred on the left flank as though to cut off the enemy. The guns found a good position with rapidity and precision, and it seemed as though a reconnaissance would frighten the enemy out of his post. The rapid fire of the battery evidently disconcerted him, for he was moving off, and the Household Cavalry was swinging round by the left to fall upon his flank, when suddenly he stopped retiring, three heavy guns came into action, and General French saw that his plan had failed this time. For the Boer general, seeing how he was menaced, had sent for reinforcements from Norval's Pont, and these had come up in the very nick of time. Not only did they prevent the success of the flanking movement of the Household troops, but they destroyed Hunter-Weston's little plan of cutting the telegraph wires. There was nothing for it but to order the troops to return to camp. As for the major of sappers, he, having wound his way through a hill-strewn country to the railway, alongside of which the telegraph wire ran, found it guarded along its whole length, and had to return baffled.

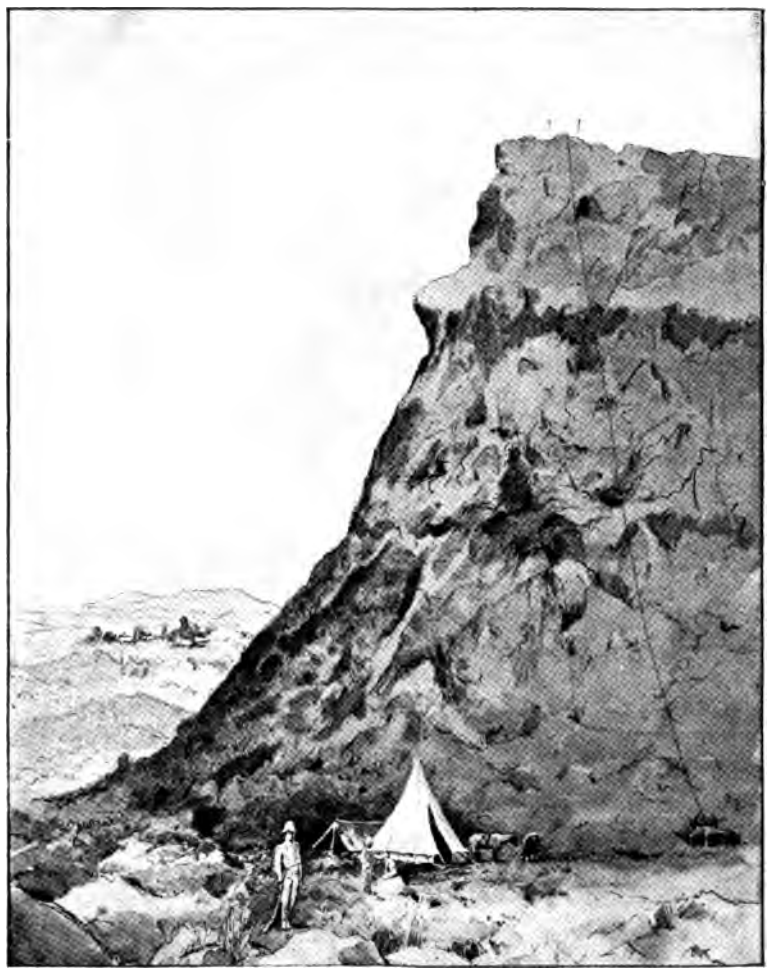
Two days afterwards (January 13th) Porter received a shock. It actually seemed as though the Boers were coming out to attack him. The men were having their dinner at about midday, eating as much dirt as food—for a dust storm was raging—when a shell pitched into the camp, followed at no long interval by another and yet another. There is no wisdom in sitting down under canvas to be shelled, so Colonel Porter ordered everybody to retire to the shelter of a neighbouring hill. And then, pleased enough to feel that the burghers had pluck enough to attack him, he moved three squadrons of the 6th Dragoon Guards and four guns of the Royal Horse Artillery, and advanced to meet the enemy with two squadrons in the front, two guns on the flank, and two squadrons in the rear—that was the formation. The movements were performed at the gallop, for horse artillery can keep up with cavalry at any speed.

He galloped two of the guns to a slight rise of the ground to the right, while two unlimbered in the plain, and immediately a long range duel began. The Boer gunners very soon had enough of it, as shell after shell pitched round their pieces. The gunners left their guns and retired to cover; and thus encouraged, the Horse Artillery limbered up like lightning, and in five minutes were nearer to the foe by about a mile. Unlimber! and the gun is ready for action. They are smart fellows, these Horse Artillery drivers and gunners, and they have need to be, for they have to keep up the credit of the smartest branch of the service.

The mile takes them within reach not only of the Boer artillery but of the laager; and now the Dutchmen see that

there are two that can play at shelling a camp. Every one of the four guns throws shells with such rapidity that it would seem as though they were competing with

Next day, the 14th, French resumed the offensive by one of his favourite moves, namely, that of menacing the enemy's rear. There were two lines by which the



VIEW OF COLESKOP AND ITS AMMUNITION HOIST.

one another as to who should ladle out the most, with the result that at the end of twenty minutes half a score of the Boer waggons are smashed to pieces, and the laager is deserted. So ends the Boer attack on Porter's camp.

Boers kept up their communications with their base—one leading direct north out of Colesberg, and the other north-west. The latter is called the Colesberg Bridge Road, and it runs between Grassy Hill and one of the kopjes occupied by our infantry.

Accordingly, a flying column of two guns R.H.A., two weak squadrons of the 6th Dragoons and 10th Hussars, and two companies of mounted infantry, was led out by Major Allenby of the 6th Dragoons with instructions to make a very wide sweep clean round the enemy's left flank and make their way right to the Colesberg Road Bridge. Should they be successful in reaching this point they were to shell the bridge—if they frightened the enemy away from it they might blow it up. At all events, they were to cause him as much alarm and annoyance as they possibly could.

General French knew very well that nothing so much alarms an enemy as to find that his road to his base is open to attack. Indeed, this is an elementary principle of warfare; and the Boers themselves at a later period of the campaign did not fail to put it into practice. Allenby managed to get to the bridge and shell it for a short time; but he found the Boers in great strength there, more than equal to his own, and on the whole disposed to take the offensive. His own force was too small to risk very much with, so that when the Boers sent round a commando of about a thousand to cut off his retreat, he, perceiving the move, fell back with all haste after planting about twenty shells in amongst the enemy. It was something like a small boy stirring up a wasp's nest with a stick.

But there was more serious fighting than this to come. The very next day (January 15th) the Free Staters and rebels made a determined attempt to wrest from French one of his coigns of vantage—an attempt that might well have been successful, and probably would have been but for the timely courage of one man.

To the north of Porter's Camp at Slingersfontein was a kopje of considerable height commanding the whole country to the east of the Boer position, and acting, moreover, as an advance post, covering the Slingersfontein Camp. On the far side, and at the foot of this kopje, were some small kopjes in a cluster. The height was held by a single company of the 1st Yorkshire Regiment and a few New Zealanders under Captain Maddocks, who had a very considerable area to defend considering the smallness of their numbers.

On the night of the 14th the Boers, having resolved to clear the British out of this position (which commanded their left flank, and prevented them from manœuvring there), moved up in considerable force with one gun and took possession of the small kopjes referred to. They lined these with about 300 riflemen; and when the morning broke they started a close and sustained fire upon the defenders of the kop.

The Yorkshires were entrenched behind a stone wall, and the New Zealanders were somewhat higher up the hill amongst the boulders. The 300 Boers on the kopjes kept up a close musketry fire upon the parapet of the wall behind which the Yorkshires were lying. To test the accuracy of the fire, one or two infantrymen hoisted their helmets on their rifles and showed them above the walls. Simultaneously they were pierced in a dozen places. The only commissioned officer present, Captain Orr, raised himself to reconnoitre, and instantly dropped wounded. The same thing happened to the sergeant-major.

While the 300 marksmen were thus volleying continuously, another hundred Boers were crawling up the side of the kop. They were intending to try Majuba tactics—that is, to crawl up to the wall

then suddenly to stand up and fire into our men at close quarters. Nearer and nearer they crept, meeting no opposition, for the simple reason that the Yorkshires were hiding behind the sheltering wall, and the handful of New Zealanders had their attention concentrated upon the Boers on the kopjes, whose fire they were endeavouring to keep down.

Nearer and yet nearer creep the stormers, when suddenly Captain Maddocks of the New Zealand Rifles catches sight of them within one hundred yards of the Yorkshires. With instant resolution he dashes down to the spot where the infantrymen are cowering irresolute. By this time the Boers are within fifty yards. "Fix bayonets! Charge!" shouts Maddocks; and at the word of command the Yorkshiremen regain their hardihood and their confidence. Every bayonet is fixed, and the athletic sons of the big county spring over the wall and dash upon the enemy.

Maddocks has with him half a dozen of his own New Zealanders, and these are no whit behind their regular comrades. Firing as they come, they rush upon the enemy. But it is not part of the Boer scheme of attack to meet a bayonet charge; and when they find the dreaded steel within a dozen feet of their chests they turn and run, bounding from rock to rock, and flying with the speed of mortal terror. But some of the Yorkshiremen can run too; and these pursue the foe, driving in the bayonet. Others prefer to empty their magazines into the broad backs of the farmers.

The attack has failed. It was bold in design and skilful in execution. The South African Dutchman had relied upon his traditional tactics of attack—a withering musketry fire covering a rush up—and it had been met by British infantry with their traditional tactics. For for two hundred years it had been the habit and the practice of the British soldier to meet a rush of the enemy with a bayonet charge in line. Still, it was a near thing; and Captain Maddocks, from "down under," deserved every ounce of the praise that was so liberally bestowed upon him by his general.

French's operations were just then at a stage when the least check might have destroyed his whole scheme. He had gained certain positions favourable for working out his plan of drawing a circle round the enemy, and if this particular position had been re-taken by the Boers, it would have meant, if not failure, at least a delay of a good many days. The little handful of New Zealanders who accompanied their captain had suffered severely. Two were killed and two wounded out of six. One of the slain men was a son of the Prime Minister of New Zealand. He was shot as he leapt the wall. The other, a private named McConnell, was killed lower down the hill. He was found with a dead Boer to the right and left of him. The Yorkshires had but three wounded and five killed. But the Boers suffered severely when their attack was repulsed; thirty bearded men were left dead on the hillside, and quite as many wounded—altogether more than half the bold storming party being touched by steel or bullet.

The attack had failed. For a little while the 300 on the kopjes kept up an ineffectual fire until such time as two guns of the Horse Artillery arrived from Slingersfontein and hurled a couple of shrapnel shells amongst them. Then they retired, mourning their dead.

On the following day some of the Colonials were again under fire, but this

time with a result vastly different. A patrol of nineteen of the New South Wales Lancers under an officer had been sent out to get round to the rear of the Boer position and reconnoitre. They found their way through the difficulties of the country well enough, and had surveyed the ground as far as they dared. Then they turned to come home. It was in the afternoon, and the horses were tired and thirsty, when the patrol came upon a stream. They galloped to it, dismounted, and led their horses into the water, when suddenly one of them espied a party of about a hundred of the enemy riding down upon them.

In a trice the hardy Australians had mounted and were racing for a kopje close at hand, which they thought would afford them some protection against the overwhelming odds. The Boers followed hard after, but the Lancers gained at every stride. They were more than half-way up the hill when they were startled by the recurring cracks of Mauser rifles. The enemy had laid their plans well. They knew that the patrol would instinctively make for this kopje, and had accordingly posted fifteen rifles nearly at the top before showing their main body. It was, in fact, about as neat an ambush as had ever been laid. Half the horses of the patrol dropped at the first discharge. Their riders stretched themselves at full length on the ground, using the bodies of their chargers as cover, and made their carbines talk. The rest turned and galloped for their lives, but by this time the main body of the enemy had got between them and their camp. It was a running fight.

"Surrender! You have no chance," shouted a burly farmer, who appeared to be the leader of the Boers.

"Surrender be damned!" was the best answer he got. It was a combat ridiculous in its unevenness. A Lancer is charging his way through a mass of foes. They drop their reins and fire at him time after time again. The Australian bends low in his saddle and dashes straight into them with intent to crush his way through, though he and his mates are all without their lances. But on the other side there is weight of numbers. One Boer by a quick shot kills his charger, and the others, dismounting, throw themselves bodily on the trooper. This is a sample of the kind of combat that is going on upon the veldt.

One Lancer makes his dash, and his horse is shot as usual. But he eludes the rush of the enemy, stands at bay, and, swinging his carbine round his head, deals deadly blows with the butt. With pistol and with rifle the Dutchmen try to kill him; but, with the exception of one bullet through his left shoulder, he escapes, not by one miracle but by a hundred. The Boers try twice to rush him, but he swings the butt of his carbine upon the head of two of them in rapid succession and fells them both to earth. "Come on," he yells, "the whole lot of you."

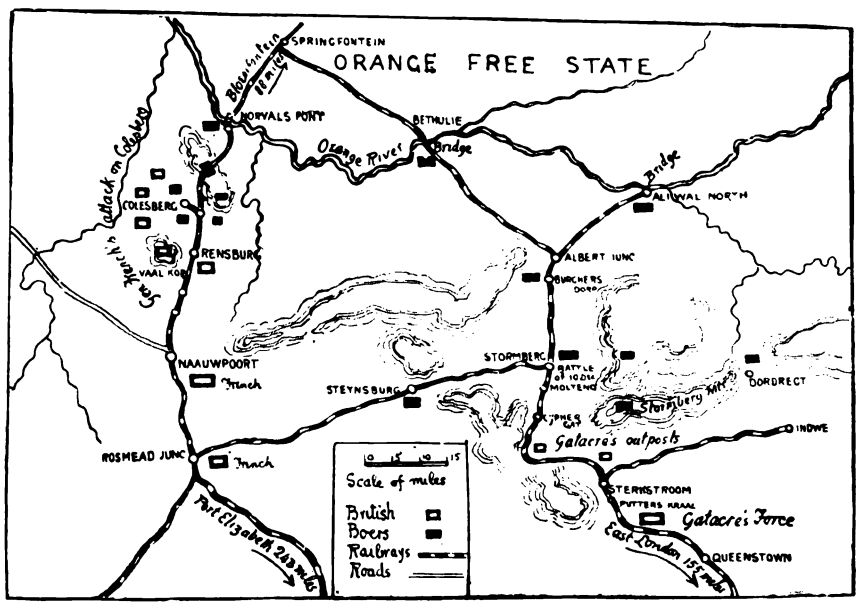
Then the excited warrior feels a touch upon his shoulder, and a voice says, "Jump up behind me." Good luck! It is one of Rimington's Tigers who, being out with two or three comrades scouting, has heard the firing and galloped up to join in. With the quickness of a practised horseman the Lancer vaults up behind the scout, and they gallop away, the irrepressible Australian shaking his fist at the baffled foe and taunting them.

But all are not so fortunate as this one. Of the whole patrol but three broke through. Of the rest two were killed and the others, wounded for the most part,

"THE REST TURNED AND GALLOPED FOR THEIR LIVES" (*p.* 548).

were captured. This is another lesson as to the need of watchfulness and most careful scouting. As a rule, the Colonial troops had but little to learn in this respect, but after this affair they kept their eyes even doubly wide open.

And so the affairs went on from day to day round Colesberg, French perpetually reconnoitring either by small patrols or larger columns. Now he would send out a squadron, now a company, now a couple of regiments. The enemy knew not from moment to moment when to expect the appearance of the British horsemen. And when they saw a few appear they never had the slightest idea whether these were a mere patrol, or the advance guard, or the skirmishing line of a considerable army. Thus were the Dutchmen made to stand to arms time after time quite needlessly. Thus were they harassed and made somewhat timid both as to their own operations and their communications. Of patrol affairs there were so many that it is impossible to record them; and as for movements of troops, they went on from day to day. But the movements were all directed to one end—namely, the threatening of the enemy's lines of communications and the cutting of those lines if the opportunity arose. On the 17th of January French received a reinforcement of considerable importance in the shape of two howitzers, which he promptly brought into action, shelling the Boers for the first time with lyddite; and on the 18th January, General Clements arrived in the camp with two battalions of the 12th Brigade—namely, the Royal Irish and the Worcestershire regiments.



FRENCH'S AND GATACRE'S OPERATIONS IN CAPE COLONY.

By this time Lord Roberts had arrived at Cape Town, and was taking charge of

all the operations in the theatre of war. He was working out a plan—or rather he had a plan already worked out, and was merely waiting for the material necessary for its carrying out to be collected. Part of Lord Roberts's plan was to use General French and a great part of his force for another operation, and he had issued orders that the division round about Colesberg should not force the fighting or bring on any general or serious engagement. If the Silent Cavalryman could manœuvre his adversary out of the Colesberg position with little or no loss, well and good. If not, there was to be no general attack, no assault with horse, foot, and artillery, even supposing that General French might feel confident of success. For my Lord Roberts had in hand a plan which he knew would infallibly result in the Boers quitting Colesberg, and, indeed, in their being particularly glad to get away. Therefore, he did not deem it either necessary or advisable, either prudent or humane, to waste the life of a single soldier in a pitched battle. His orders to French were, therefore:—"Keep them on the move. Harass them all you can. Threaten their communications and cut the lines if possible. Give them no rest. But do not upon any account fight them."

That is why General French did not strike a decisive blow at the burghers and rebels whom he found opposed to him around Colesberg. He was in a good position for attacking them, and could, no doubt, have cleared them out and perhaps captured the greater part of them. But the enemy's position was a strong one for defence, and to capture it meant the certain sacrifice of several scores of lives. So he continued to manœuvre.

On the 25th January, for example, he went out to reconnoitre Rietfontein Plessis Pass, which is a pass through the range of hills running east and west about six miles north of Colesberg. If the pass could be occupied without fighting, he intended to take it. So he set out at dawn with a battery of Royal Horse Artillery and one of Field Artillery, two regiments of cavalry (6th Dragoons and 10th Hussars), a company of mounted infantry, and four companies of the Yorkshire Regiment, four companies of the Essex Regiment, and all the Wiltshire Regiment

The night before he had sent out some mounted infantry to seize another pass about five miles away from Rietfontein Plessis, and in the same range. From this pass he intended to start his movement on the position he really wished to acquire.

In brief, the plan of attack, or rather of operation, was this:—The two battalions of infantry were to push along the hill-tops, while the cavalry and artillery marched along the valley and pretended to be about to attack the pass from the front. By these movements the enemy's fire would be drawn, and it would be possible to take the pass without serious fighting.

The various companies and squadrons carried out their part of the work with machine-like precision. The enemy were found to be possessed of artillery and to be in considerable strength, but still it is possible General French might have sent a battalion to turn them out at the bayonet's point if his scouts had not discovered that large reinforcements were being sent towards the pass and would soon arrive there. Even so it would not have been very difficult to carry the position, but General French would have contravened the orders of his superior if he had risked even so much as severe

fighting. Wherefore regretfully he returned to camp, having shelled the enemy somewhat, and having discovered the weakness of him and learned once more what wonderful scouts the British Colonials were.

Never was any commander better served in this respect than General French. Other generals might complain, and did complain, of being badly served by their Intelligence Department, but General French never had the slightest reason to grumble at his scouts. More especially did Rimington's Scouts show their value. They scoured the country for information. Not a Boer mouse could squeak but the noise would be heard by one of the "Tigers." If they had a fault, it was that they were too full of fight; for a scout's business is not to fight, but to scout.

French was also most fortunate in having able lieutenants to serve him—notably Colonel Porter and Hunter-Weston, the Sapper. But it is noticeable that a competent commander usually has competent lieutenants; simply because one of the tests of a commander's competency is his ability to choose fitting instruments to execute his plans.

High was the praise accorded to the Silent Cavalryman for his conduct of the operations round about Rensburg. By it he laid the foundation of a reputation as a strategist and a tactician second to none in the Army, excepting only "Bobs" himself. He had shown the other divisional commanders how the Boers ought to be fought. He had shown them what could be done by skill. He had shown them that there are occasions when a little wit outweighs much force.

Excepting only Baden-Powell, there was no British commander in the field for whom the Boers themselves had any respect—of whom they had any fear—until the untried Colonel of Horse entered upon his campaign. Every other commander they had outwitted by the most simple of stratagems. In the words of one of their own men who afterwards fell into our hands, "We used to laugh continually in our camps to think what fools the English were." And it must be admitted that the grim laughter had plenty of cause. And it was humiliating to the British people, who do not lack intelligence, to think that their trained officers—men of education, who had had opportunities, at all events, for the study of their profession—should be continually outmanœuvred and beguiled by simple farmers. It was maddening to hear of lives lost, of patrols captured almost daily through sheer wanton foolishness. To these stories the cavalry division did not contribute.

French was now about to relinquish the command of operations in this neighbourhood. He had been called higher.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE SIEGE OF KIMBERLEY (*continued*).

IT was not until after the 10th of December, the day of Magersfontein, that the siege of Kimberley really began to be dreary. All that day the officers of the garrison watched from the conning-towers the bursting of shells upon the Boer positions, and hour after hour expected the message, "Position captured." And when no message came their hearts sank within them.

Since the heavy loss in Scott-Turner's last sortie, the policy or pouncing-out had been abandoned. True, there was an occasional "demonstration" and daily skirmishing of a desultory character; but there was no longer any attempt made to sally out upon the enemy in force and drive him from his entrenchments. For as the weary days wore on—"yesterday as like to-morrow as two peas"—and Methuen failed to make any progress, Colonel Kekewich saw that he could not afford to risk in offensive operations the men whom he might want to man the walls.

All the necessities of life—bread, butcher's meat, meal, flour, and the like—were in the hands of the military authorities, and were only doled out by the ounce to people who obtained permits from the officer appointed for the purpose. By this time all private household stocks had been consumed. Our Scottish Town Guardsman was better off than most folk, and began to reap the reward of his kailyard industry. He writes (December 19th): "Vegetables are not obtainable, and my little garden has come in very handy, and kept us going nicely. It is necessary to fight at the butcher's door for an hour before you can get your daily allowance of meat, so we go without meat. Fortunately, ——— is very friendly with several folks who keep cows, and we have never yet gone without fresh cow's milk." And then an ominous sentence, of a state of things that was to tell a tale—making many a woman childless, leaving many a child motherless. "Provisions are running out, and our water is very bad. . . . We are looking forward to our Christmas dinner"—turkeys were 75s. each, and lean at that—"and ——— is busy trying to get a hen and a tin of plum pudding"—plum puddings had not been requisitioned by the military. "It is too late to send our usual festive season's greetings, but we wished you them all the same, and I hope you all had a rattling good time."

Festive season's greetings! Let us examine the kind of festivity prevalent in Kimberley what time in England the merry gentlemen—"Let nothing you dismay"—were ordering Christmas turkeys for themselves and their poor relations. An edict went forth that, "from and after Thursday next, the 28th December, 1899, the allowances to consumers per head per day shall be as follows: To Europeans and coloured colonials, (*a*) Boer meal 6 oz., flour meal 4 oz., (*b*) bread 14 oz.; mealie meal, Kaffir corn meal, samp, 2 oz. of either; rice 2 oz., sugar 2 oz., tea ¼ oz., coffee ½ oz."

Asiatics were not allowed any Boer meal, flour meal, or bread, but 8 oz. of rice instead; while the unfortunate natives were expected to sustain life on 6 oz. of mealie meal, 4 oz. of Kaffir corn meal, and 2 oz. of samp—three-quarters of a pound of corn-food a day. Sugar, tea, and coffee were served out in the same quantities as to Europeans.

At this time the meat allowance was half a pound per head per day; but within a week—*i.e.* on January 3rd, 1900—the supply had almost become exhausted, and only a quarter of a pound per head per day was allowed.

"An army moves on its stomach," said Buonaparte, meaning thereby that food is as important a necessity of war as are arms. And Colonel Kekewich well knew that Kimberley's powers of resistance depended entirely on its stomach. He therefore framed the most stringent regulations to prevent waste, and to ensure that so long as there was food in the town it should be share-and-share-alike as far as possible. Every retail storekeeper, dealer, and salesman "who owns, possesses, or controls" any of the food-stuffs enumerated above was bound, on presentation of a food permit, to supply the quantities mentioned in the permit at the prices fixed by the commander of the garrison, on payment being made in cash. And not only that, but any storekeepers, etc., were prohibited from selling any of the food-stuffs to any person, and even from giving any away, except to holders of permits. Storekeepers, dealers, etc., breaking any of the regulations were liable to summary arrest and imprisonment; and every one of them was made personally liable for all breaches of regulation committed by his agents, assistants, and servants.

The last-cited clause was somewhat contrary to the spirit of British jurisprudence, which has sapiently laid it down that in all criminal matters a man can only be made responsible for his own acts, and not for those of his servants, unless his actual knowledge and consent can be proved: for instance, the sale of liquor to persons already drunk. The publican is not liable where the sale is by a potman, unless the publican can be proved to have authorised the unlawful act. But Robert George Kekewich knew human nature well enough to be aware that if the master had to suffer in any case, the assistant would be forced to observe the rules.

As to the supply permits. An inhabitant who desired one must apply for a week's supplies at a time, stating the number of persons in his household, the quantities of food he "owned, possessed, or controlled," and on no account was he to be allowed a second supply until the next week—which made people careful. Hotels, clubs, and boarding-houses were allowed supplies only in respect of their regular boarders.

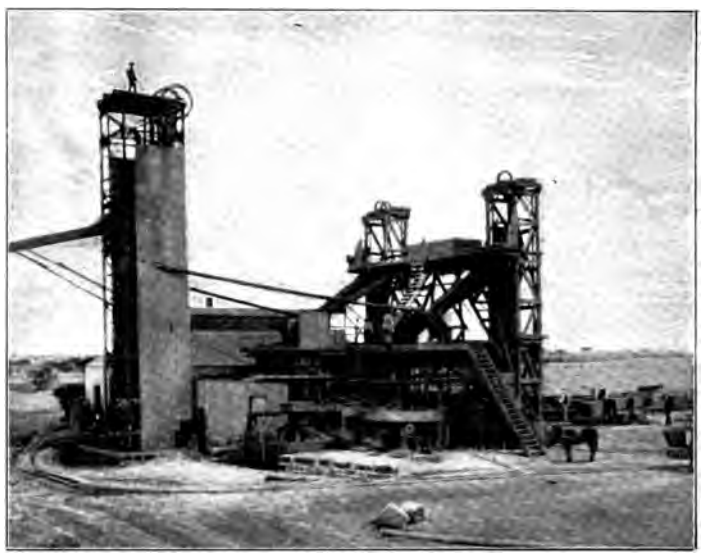
Prices were fixed on a very moderate scale. Meat, until the 3rd of January, was 8d. the pound. Afterwards, beef and mutton rose to 1s., horse, mule and donkey flesh being retailed at 8d. Water was carried round in carts, at the *prix fixe* of 1s. 6d. per load. And to prevent a "corner" in fuel, which once threatened, the prices of wood and coal were regulated also. Coal was 6s. 6d. per bag of about a hundredweight. Wood, split for kindling, was 3s. per bag of 100lb.; and uncut wood 2s. per 100lb.

For the purchase of fuel and water no permits were necessary, but maximum prices only were fixed. As to luxuries—such as marmalade, vegetables, jam, butter, milk—those persons who were mercenary

and possessed these things for sale were able to command fabulous prices for them. For there was no lack of money in the Diamond City.

As further illustrating the internal arrangements of the besieged city, it ought to be said that no one was allowed in the streets at night without a pass issued by the Cape Police. Moreover, it was bottle." One keeper of a liquor store was prosecuted for breach of this very salutary rule, and after that Colonel Kekewich managed to make himself obeyed.

Still, militarism was not allowed to run riot in the town. One incident there was in the early part of the siege that is an object lesson in British legality. Love of legality is the predominating feature of the



THE DE BEERS' WASHING MACHINE.
(Photo: J. E. Middlebrook, Kimberley.)

" deemed desirable," so ran the proclamation, " for the public safety that the sale of liquor to natives should be restricted for the time being in the townships of Kimberley and Beaconsfield. Therefore " Robert George Kekewich did " proclaim and make known "—beautiful language these proclamations are always couched in —that summary arrest and punishment awaited the person found selling intoxicating liquor to any native except between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., and " then only to be consumed on the premises, and not by the English-speaking peoples, and nothing will shake it out of them. Usually, when a town is in a state of siege, the officer commanding the garrison suspends, by the right of the strong arm, all civil authority, and leaves all crimes and offences to be dealt with by a military tribunal. Such a tribunal acts for the preservation of order, and sees to it that the will of the officer commanding—which is sometimes called " Martial Law "—is observed.

But in Kimberley it was not so.

There was a force enrolled called the

"Town Guard"—one for the town of Kimberley and one for the township of Beaconsfield, the latter a suburb of the former. And somehow or other a certain Captain Blackbeard, a zealous officer of the Beaconsfield Town Guard, took it into his head that he was justified in compelling the services of any able-bodied men who were not already engaged in the defence of the town.

One such was a man named Johnson, a former soldier of the Queen who had served in the Royal Horse Artillery. He was of the age of thirty-two, and able-bodied. But he refused to join the Colonial Mounted Corps because the pay was insufficient, and objected "to mix with a lot of irregulars"—meaning thereby the Town Guard. Wherefore Captain Blackbeard sent for the ex-artilleryman, and invited him to come and see him. Johnson refused. So the captain sent an armed party to compel him to come in, and the armed party captured Johnson and marched him down to the Town Guard headquarters. There he obstinately refused to obey the orders of Captain Blackbeard, and was, in consequence, delivered over to the police.

But Johnson sought the aid of the law courts, and brought an action against the too-zealous captain for wrongful arrest. What is more, he succeeded, and Blackbeard had to pay a small fine and the expenses. One does not know which to admire most—the courage and fairness of the magistrate in thus deciding according to law, regardless of consequences, or the forbearance of the military in submitting to the awards of the civil tribunal. Certain it is that in no other country in the world would Captain Blackbeard have been called to account, under the circumstances, for interfering with the liberty of the subject. As for Johnson, the less said about him the better.

As the old year faded and the new year dawned, the siege began to grow unutterably wearisome. "The siege is dragging out its miserable course, and we are heartily sick of it all. . . . We had a very quiet Christmas—no plum-duff and no hen, but we had a tin of Mulligatawny soup in the house, and had a very nice dinner. I had asked a friend to join us, but had to go and explain we had no dinner for him." The "nice" dinner, then, was not excessive in quantity. But imagine the courage and cheerfulness of the man who, having neither hen nor plum-duff, could make his Christmas feast contentedly off a tin of soup!

Perhaps the most wearisome thing of all, and the thing most harassing to the spirit of the garrison and the minds of Colonel Kekewich and his staff, was the necessity of constant watchfulness against traitors within the walls—far more to be dreaded than the enemy without.

One day a picket of the Lancashires was on duty on the east side when the sergeant of the picket saw a man rise from the south at the distance of about 1,000 to 1,200 yards and start running towards the Boer lines. "Shoot that man!" he shouts. On the word a rifle went up, there was a crack, and the runner pitched forward on his face. "Beautiful shot," said the sergeant. When dusk fell, the picket went out and brought in the body—for what had been a man was now a corpse. It proved to be that of a man with a Dutch name who had volunteered for one of the irregular corps, and examination showed that he was carrying away with him plans and sketches of the fortifications of the town. He had reaped the reward of his treachery.

Now vigilance became doubly watchful. And ere long another of the same kidney was captured. He crept through the lines unperceived, and ran for it. But there happened to be on duty a Town Guardsman who could sprint also; and he gave chase. A quarter of a mile and the Briton gained rapidly; another quarter, and he was on the heels of his man. Now! For the safety of the town, one burst of speed! And the pursuer gathered himself together and bounded forward. In a few strides he caught up the runaway, knocked him down, and then, picking him up, marched him back to the lines. This traitor had carried with him a screw from one of the guns—the loss of which would have rendered the piece practically worthless.

He was handed over to the guard; and he also had meted out to him the reward of his treachery.

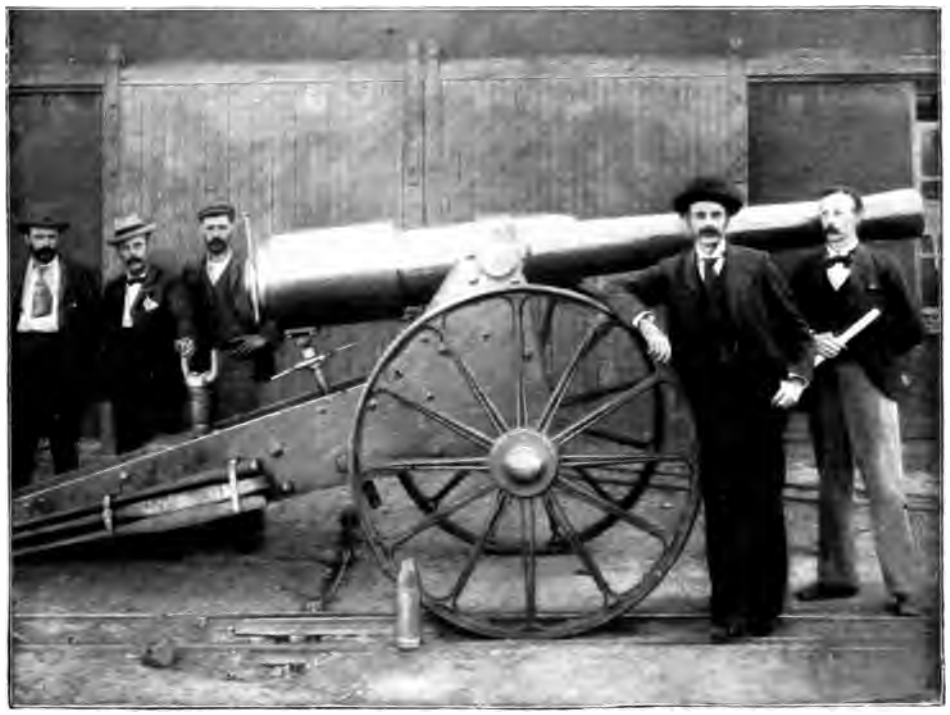
All was not misery within the lines; and the folk of the beleaguered town had hearts warm and large enough to feel for the other people's troubles. For we read of a cricket match—Ladies *v* Gentlemen—played on the 28th of December in aid of the Refugees' Fund.

Our Scotsman was one of the lucky ones. His garden, to which he sedulously attended in his times off duty, grew peaches, beet, onions, tomatoes, leeks, beans, and other health-giving fruits and vegetables. With all the gardener's pride he notes:—"Our peach-tree is just about ripe. We have about 120 on it." And very valuable they were. For peaches realised the fabulous price (for Kimberley) of 6d. each; whilst tomatoes fetched 3s. 6d. a pound.

In was in January that the town of Kimberley showed the extent of its resources; for then Labram, the engineer, made his famous big gun. Already he had manufactured large numbers of shells for the 7-pounders, as well as two armoured engines and trains; but his big gun was the final wonder. It was not quite of the R.A. pattern, as made at Woolwich, because Labram had tried to have it finished quickly; and to that end omitted one or two intricacies. Moreover, all the tools required had to be made first. There was only a limited quantity of suitable metal in the De Beers engineering shop, namely, a lump of hammered mild steel of 10 feet in length and 10½ inches diameter; and out of it was made a 4·9-inch, or 28-pounder breech-loading piece. It was duly christened by the name and style of "Long Cecil."

Imagine the amazement of the Boers when, on the 19th of January, the gun was first fired. A party of them were sitting about near the waterworks, eating a meal, when there suddenly dropped into their midst a great shell, which burst and scattered iron all around. The diners did not wait for desert; but ran for a mile without so much as looking round, while Colonel Kekewich and the clever engineer stood upon the conning-tower and watched the performance. "I thought," chuckled Labram, "it would astonish them!"

It did. The Boers could not make it out. Before the siege began, and in the early days of it, they had been informed as to the artillery possessed by the garrison, and knew perfectly well that at the waterworks they were out of range of the 7-pounder "pea-shooters." What in the world was this? And they answered themselves and said, it is another device of that son of Satan, Cecil Rhodes! And when they had recovered their presence of mind, some of them went back and collected some pieces of shell, and found it cast with the inscription, "With Mr.



"LONG CECIL," THE HOME-MADE KIMBERLEY GUN, AND ITS MAKERS.
(*Photo: Hancock, Kimberley.*)

Rhodes's compliments." And they perceived that the burst shell was much larger than any that could be fired out of a 7-pounder. Wherefrom they inferred that by some means or other the *rooineks* had possessed themselves of a big gun—which seemed to make the capture of the town still more distant.

Well might Commandant Delarey be astonished. More were astonished than he. And we may venture to think that the British military authorities were astonished more than anyone else. Here was a town, a small town in the heart of South Africa, which had, by the supineness or want of foresight—to say the least of it—of the Cape Government, been left without adequate means of defence. Now it had been provided with such means by the genius and skill of one or two private persons. It took only three weeks, after the plans had been approved and the work decided upon, for a man without experience, aided by an equally inexperienced staff of workmen, to make a gun of long range, large calibre and modern mechanism. And this without either plant or tools ready to hand.

It was one other instance of private enterprise coming to the aid of the British Empire. How much, one would like to know, does that Empire owe to private enterprise, how little to the efforts of Governments? Of all the incidents of the war, none was so wonderful as the building of "Long Cecil"; and Labram will

be remembered gratefully by Kimberley folk as one of the saviours of the city. He did not live to see the triumphal entry of British troops, nor to hear the chorus of praise and admiration sung by experts and populace alike over his workmanship ; for a Boer shell stopped the working of that busy brain for ever. But ere he died he had saved the city of his habitation.

The worst of the siege was still to come. Up to January the town had been fairly healthy, the deaths from disease not being much more than normal. But after the diet of horseflesh started, the inhabitants began to suffer one of the usual plagues of beleaguered towns — dysentery. It was not the men who suffered so much as the women and children, and the death-rate amongst the little ones became alarming. They perished in scores from the effects of the coarse feeding. Not only dysentery, but scurvy made its appearance.

Things would have been much worse had not Mr. Rhodes come to the rescue with one of his brilliant ideas—a soup-kitchen. He enlisted the aid of Dr. Smart, a member of the Cape Legislative Assembly, Captain Tysen, and the Hon. Mrs. Rochefort Maguire, the daughter of Viscount Peel, who had gone with her husband to Kimberley when war threatened. Mr. Rhodes supplied the money to purchase as much beef as could be had, especially the bones, which were useless to the ordinary consumer. He also bought, and supplied from his own land, considerable quantities of vegetables ; and from these ingredients a nourishing and wholesome soup was made. It was distributed at the rate of a pint per head per day to sick and ailing persons, women and children, and did much to keep the inhabitants in health and strength. One satisfactory feature of the soup-kitchen was that from the time of its establishment scurvy decreased.

In fact Mr. Rhodes, though he had some differences of opinion with the officer commanding the garrison, and though he could ill brook having any authority set over him in his own town, did good service. And chiefly in this, that he procured the voluntary rendering of services which might have had to be obtained compulsorily. He mounted and practically enlisted the Kimberley Light Horse, he gave employment to large quantities of native labour, he originated the soup kitchen, he supplied Labram with the raw material for his great gun.

Besides, he annoyed the Boers, and kept the Kaffirs in order by a look.

When "Long Cecil" first raised his voice he established in favour of the besieged the preponderant weight in artillery. As a result, the Boers were obliged to move their guns and their laagers to such a distance that they could no longer shell the town. But not for long did they remain quiet. Five days after the 28-pound shell plumped into the laager near the waterworks the siege entered upon a new phase.

The 24th of January was a day memorable in the annals of the besiegement, for on that day the Boers began a series of bombardments of a terrible character. They surrounded the town with their artillery, and began a concentrated shell-fire from nine 12-pounder and 15-pounder guns. They used their pieces like howitzers—that is, they elevated the muzzles and fired at a very high angle, thus giving the shells a longer range, though diminishing the velocity.

Very little attention was paid by the Boer gunners to the defensive works. Most of their projectiles were clearly

aimed at the town, and they were only too successful. Houses were wrecked, and here and there blood ran. The first to fall a victim was a young woman named Maddocks, daughter of a man murdered in the Matabele rebellion. She was in her house dressing when a shell dropped through the roof, exploded in the room, and killed her on the spot. Another of these horrid messengers of death burst in a room where a mother and three children were eating their scanty morning meal.

But on the whole the shelling, though calculated to shake the nerve of a civilian population less plucky and determined than that of Kimberley, caused much less of damage and destruction than might have been expected, considering the fact that no fewer than 900 shells were thrown into the town during the 24th, 25th, and 26th of January. One man put his head out of a window, only to encounter a 15-pound shell. He was decapitated. On the other hand another had his hat riddled with shrapnel bullets, while he himself escaped without a mark.

Our diarist records another instance of a shell bursting in his neighbour's yard, where there were about twenty chickens. Strange to say, not one of them was touched. But, he adds ruefully, "the Boer shells are coming nearer."

Yes, and something else was coming nearer. No less than a 94-pounder Creusot gun—a Long Tom, under the charge of M. Léon, the French-Hebrew gun-engineer. This gentleman, having imparted of his lore to the artillerymen outside Ladysmith, came to Kimberley to see if he could bombard it into submission. He had had execrable luck with Sir George White. But then, White was a Scot-Irishman—an absurd sort of a man, who fought long after he was beaten and came up smiling, who sent out parties to steal your breech-blocks and blow your beautiful machines up with gun-cotton. M. Léon would now try his skill upon Colonel Kekewich. Perhaps he might have better fortune with him.

Besides, there were no 4·7's at Kimberley to hit back.

M. Léon arrived, also the 94-pounder. The giant had an emplacement made for it at Kamfusdam, a heap of blue earth formerly occupied by the garrison, but evacuated as of no value. From behind this mound of earth the monster opened fire on the 7th February—a day the most miserable of all the miserable days in the history of the Diamond City.

It was like a nightmare. A shell whistled as it hurtled through the air. If it happened to hit a house or a street, that house or that street was knocked into splinters and fragments. When it burst it scattered enormous pieces of iron to a distance of as much as a hundred yards. Our Scotsman now began to have a bad time of it personally. He lived at Kenilworth, and one day it was seen that the big gun was being turned towards that suburb. Hastily his wife and he rushed to their one-time pleasant home—she to rescue such of her household gods and personal matters as she conveniently could. Suddenly the husband burst into a room where she was packing. "We have three minutes to get away in," said he; "the gun is trained straight on this house." You may imagine that the lady lost all immediate interest in jewels and fine apparel. Hastily snatching up a few articles of clothing, she ran out of the house, her husband following her closely. They were both young and active, and they ran fast; but they had hardly cleared 200 yards when, with a screech

and a whirr, a 94-pound shell dropped through the roof of their house, and in one minute the whole place was demolished. To say with the Scriptures, "not one stone was left upon another," is too weak. Of this house there was hardly a single fragment to be seen that could not be put into one's pocket.

Twenty-nine of the 94-pounders, besides several hundred smaller and less objectionable missiles, dropped into Kimberley between the hours of 5.30 a.m. and 7 p.m. on February 7th; on the 9th twice as many. There was little loss, comparatively speaking, but by the irony of fate one of the few killed was the very man whom Kimberley could spare least. At six in the evening a shell dropped in the bedroom of Labram, the engineer, killing him instantly and burying him in the ruins of his house.

For the first time the situation in the town had become really serious. Day after day the bombardment went on—94-pounders and shrapnel. Labram was buried on the 10th, at night, and the enemy shelled the funeral procession.

But the British were not disposed to lie down to be shot at. The killing was not to be all on one side. A few mounted men sallied out on the night of the 9th and attacked a Boer picket which was holding some advanced rifle-pits about 1,800 yards in advance of where the big guns were emplaced. Then fifteen picked shots of the loyal North Lancashires took a hand in the proceedings. Entrenching themselves in the captured position, they made it their business to keep up a hot fire on the big gun, blazing away whenever a single Boer showed himself. Later, a Maxim gun was taken up to the rifle-pits; and, being trained upon the emplacement of the 94-pounder, stammered out bullets incessantly.

THE TOWN GUARD SNIPING IN THE TRENCHES.

It was a bold game that the Lancashires played. An enemy plucky enough to assault them could have wiped them out, so few were they ; but the Boers besieging the Diamond City were no good at rushing a position. Wherefore the British sharpshooters played havoc with the Dutchmen's gunners. Particularly there was M. Léon, who had taught those gunners the use of the gigantic weapon. Him a marksman of the Lancashires just caught sight of, and with a rapid snapshot put a bullet in his eye—which was an end of the gunnery of M. Léon for a time.

Still, the big fellow was protected by sandbags, and it was not possible for the heroic little company of British to silence him. What could be done was done. The shooting of the Lancashires was so accurate that no gunner dared to show himself—which prevented any very accurate aiming ; and the Dutchmen were reduced to casting their shells into the town promiscuously.

But even this was bad enough. Shells dropped into houses and burst there, wrecking everything. They crashed through walls. They burst in the streets. Women and little children were slain as they crouched fearfully in their homes : and at last, on the 11th February, it was decided that the only thing to be done to put these dear ones out of danger was to send them down the mines. Cecil Rhodes, that indefatigable man, set to work everybody he could lay hands on, and speedily had some of these underground homes ready for habitation. And that is how, from the 11th of February onwards, the women and children of Kimberley lived—shut out from God's sun and sky—darkness and day alike to them—waxing paler and paler every hour.

It was that darkest hour before the dawn.

The commander of the garrison sent despatches to Lord Roberts, telling him of the straits of the townsfolk ; telling him how the great gun would soon render Kimberley a heap of ruins. Not asking for help. On the contrary ; the grim colonel of the Lancashires set his teeth and promised to hold out, if necessary, until the Day of Judgment. His heart bled for the women and children, but he knew his duty to his Queen and his country.

And the men of Kimberley were worthy of such a leader. There were some who thought—and said so—that the Imperial Government ought to be pressed to send relief at once. But of handing over their town to the Dutchmen, of surrendering conditionally or unconditionally, no one breathed a word.

Patience ! The Empire's greatest soldier has heard your cry. Even now he makes ready his horsemen ; and at this moment he is talking earnestly to a man whose quiet face, determined and dour, proclaims him a fitting instrument in the hands of the master of war. It is the Silent Cavalryman.

CHAPTER XLIV.

KIMBERLEY RELIEF FORCE—MACDONALD MOVES.

PENDING the elaboration of Lord Roberts's plan of campaign, the force at Modder River had been comparatively quiet. The naval guns and the howitzers, fired into Magersfontein daily, did no very great hurt except upon one occasion when a lyddite shell struck a gun and blew it to fragments. There were great camps now established all the way from the Modder River to the Orange at Enslin and Honey-nest Kloof and Orange River Station. From these posts on the Modder River parties of mounted infantry and cavalry made occasional excursions to the east into the Free State.

In the early days of February it was reported to Lord Roberts that the enemy intended to send out a force on the left of our line of communications to cross by a drift several miles up on the west, and so to make a detour which would bring them on the west of the railway between the Modder and the Orange. To check any such movement an order was sent to Lord Methuen from headquarters to send a brigade out westwards to take possession of a drift called Koodoosberg Drift, about twenty miles from Modder River.

For this work the commander-in-chief selected the Highland Brigade, and accordingly on Saturday morning, the 3rd of February, the Highland Brigade, four battalions strong, with the 9th Lancers and two field batteries, moved out of camp for the first time since Magersfontein. They crossed the Modder early and moved west. The day was sweltering, and it was with painful steps and slow that the infantry toiled along the road. The slow progress of the force was due largely to the necessity for careful scouting, and on the first day the column bivouacked at Fraser's Drift.

The next day they moved on along the river-bank, and, though many strong men succumbed to the heat and were forced to lie down by the roadside, the brigade managed to march the fourteen miles necessary to take them to Koodoosberg. Arriving here late in the afternoon, "Fighting Mac" occupied his whole force in entrenching both sides of the river, and he also sent the Seaforth Highlanders to the top of one of the hills which form the Koodoosberg. This mountain is curved in shape, with a peak at each end and a long ridge connecting the two extremes.

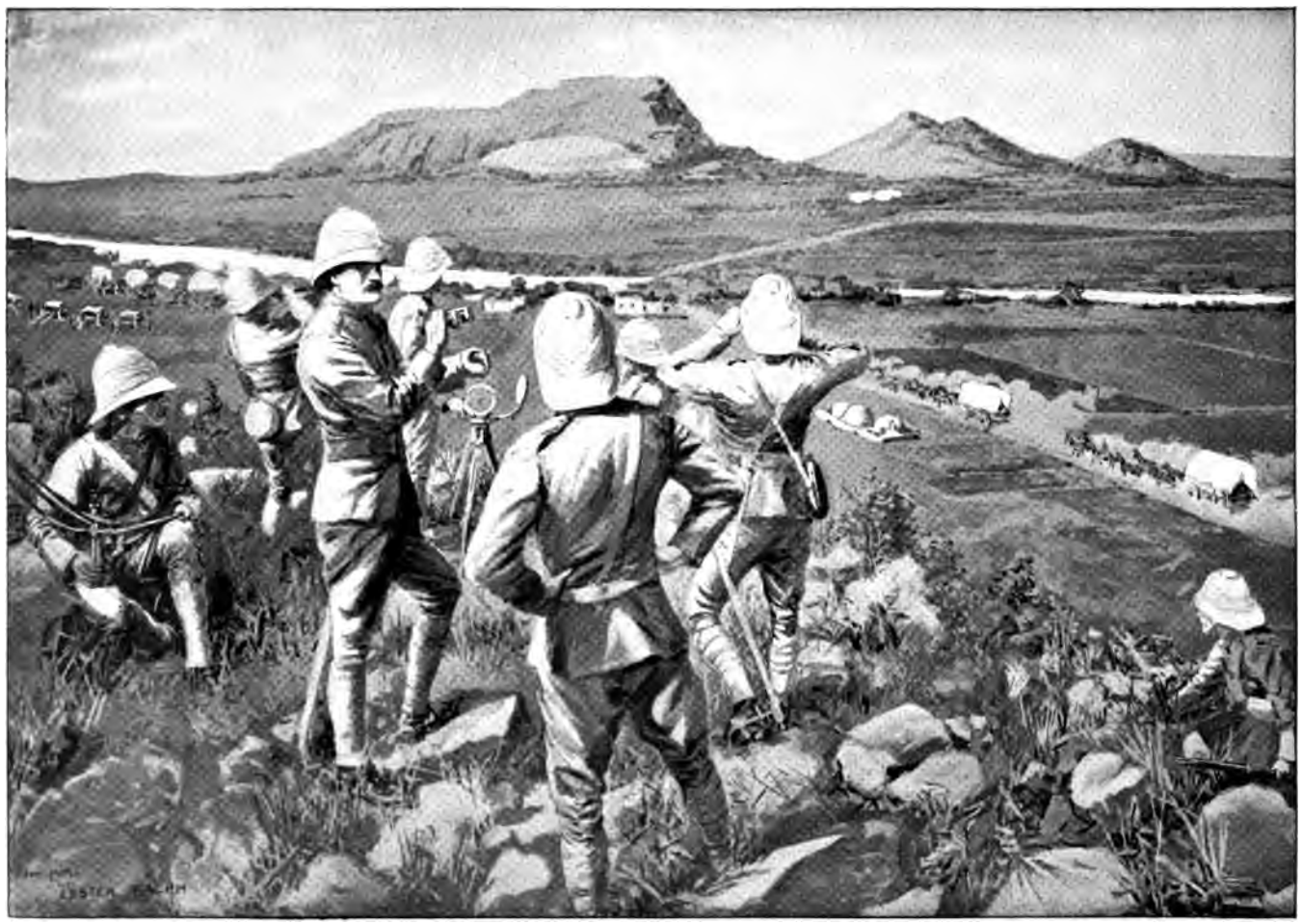
One of these extremes the Seaforths occupied, and entrenched themselves upon it. Next morning the cavalry went out to the north-west, while a great part of the Highlanders occupied themselves in bathing in the river. But soon there was a call to arms, for a cavalry patrol came back at the gallop with the news of a large body of mounted Boers approaching from the north-west. The Lancers and the Highland Light Infantry promptly moved out to meet them, anxious to come to close quarters with them; but the Dutchmen have no intention of joining battle. They trot to within about 2,000 yards, and some of them dismount and try a few rifle shots, but when the Light Infantry, with the Lancers, press forward, the Boers jump on their weedy ponies once more and gallop back.

Macdonald spent the rest of the day in entrenching himself still more securely. He could not drag artillery to the top of the kopje held by the Seaforths, because the southern slope was too steep, but he constructed breastworks so as to protect the drift against any attack. On the 7th he found the enemy in touch with him, they having marched within striking distance during the night. The Highland Brigade was disposed straddling the drift. On the right bank of the river, holding the height before mentioned, was the sadly depleted battalion of the Black Watch, with most of the Seaforths and one company Highland Light Infantry, and near them at the foot of the hill were four guns of the 62nd Battery. The rest of the Highland Light Infantry, seven companies, were at the drift on the north side, while on the south bank were the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and the remainder of the Seaforths. The cavalry was divided into two parties, one on each flank. The enemy evidently intended to force the passage of the drift. They had a gun which they dragged to the other kopje of Koodoosberg, and with it, at nine a.m. on February 7th, they began shelling the position protecting the ford. At the same time a commando crossed the river higher up and started sniping at the Sutherlands. But the Boer commandant, whoever he was, had sufficient knowledge of the value of a position to see that, so long as our infantry held the other kopje of Koodoosberg, he could by no means force the passage of the river. So he turned his gun on the kopje held by the Black Watch and the Seaforths, and then sent out a strong party of riflemen to the assault. It soon became evident to Macdonald that the main attack was here; so he sent up a reinforcement of three companies Highland Light Infantry, and then four more companies of the Seaforths. So that there were now on the kopje two battalions and a half: not at full strength — Magersfontein had prevented that; but still over 1,500 men. Shrapnel plumped into the position, and hour after hour the Boers fired their cool, vicious sniping shots at all who showed themselves.

But the canny Scotsman had learned something about cover by this time. Colonel Hughes Hallett was in command of the troops at this point, and he moved about amongst them, showing the men where they could best obtain protection and at the same time some view of the enemy. It was ten o'clock when fighting became serious on the berg, and from that hour until six p.m. the fire continued unabated. It was not very exciting—not the kind of fighting that the kilted soldier would have preferred had he been allowed to choose the mode of combat. The Highlanders were not bad shots, and by this slow and painful method, like so many cats watching mouse-holes, they contrived to inflict a good deal of damage upon their foes.

On the opposite bank of the stream another party of burghers pushed up to encounter the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders; but the Scotsmen were not the kind of men to be rushed, and they held on steadily. All day the battle raged at long range, and Macdonald began to see light. He would hold the Boers fighting there on both sides of the river, and send to Methuen's camp for cavalry and horse artillery; and these should advance on the north bank, sweeping round Koodoosberg and capturing every single Boer. Of course, such a movement must be smartly executed.

The notion was that the next day (the 8th) the Highlanders should fight a



GENERAL MACDONALD WATCHING THE BATTLE OF KOODOOSBERG.

defensive battle at first until the expected cavalry should reach a position from which they could sweep round on the Boer rear. At this moment the whole Highland Brigade should make a forward movement, concentrating its artillery fire upon the kopje held by the enemy, and sweeping round its left wing, so as to drive the Dutchmen to the north bank. Then would be a propitious moment for the cavalry reinforcement and the horse artillery to dash in upon their rear, when they would be forced to fight to the finish or surrender, man and horse.

It was, in fact, a pretty little trap.

Macdonald lost no time in communicating his plan to Lord Methuen, who sent out Brigadier-General Babington with a strong force of cavalry and two batteries of Horse Artillery. These started on the morning of the 8th at 11.30 a.m., and they ought to have reached their point of attack early in the afternoon. But a fate seemed to pursue the Kimberley Relief Force. Babington, instead of arriving early, arrived late. The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, according to Macdonald's plan, had swept up the other bank of the river, fallen upon the Boers who had crossed, and driven them pell mell over Painter's Drift, the ford that the Boers had used in crossing to the southern bank. In this attack the whole of the 9th Lancers took part, and two field guns. If at this moment Babington, with his cavalry and horse artillery, had appeared on the Boer rear, nothing could have saved the burghers from wholesale capture. They were in a net, drawn round them on three sides. Babington ought to have been there to close the fourth side. But he was not. Instead of hurling himself forward, man and horse, with all the speed that could be got, he advanced quite deliberately, so that the Boers, who had plenty of scouts about the country, were advised of his coming, and escaped.

So Macdonald's plan failed. Not by any fault of his own, but purely owing to the fact that Brigadier-General Babington declined to hurry his cattle. Field-Marshal Lord Roberts liked men who could move when movement was necessary, and the first thing he did on hearing of Babington's failure was to supersede him in his command.

On the 10th of February Lord Roberts visited the camp of the Highland Brigade, and spoke to them as he alone could speak. He told them how in his campaigns in Afghanistan the Highlanders had always stood by him. He had never campaigned without Highlanders, he said, and he would not like to be without them now. There would be plenty of marching and plenty of fighting for those who liked it, and he looked to the Highland Brigade under General Macdonald to behave as they always had behaved whenever he had had the honour of campaigning with them.

From that moment the kilted regiments, which had undoubtedly been somewhat shaken by their terrible casualties at Magersfontein, recovered their tone, and before the war was many weeks older they proved that they were still worthy of the proud traditions of their race.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE NEW PLAN OF CAMPAIGN: FRENCH'S MARCH TO KIMBERLEY.

BY the end of January the transport service had been reorganised, and reinforcements had been poured into Cape Colony sufficient to allow the new commander-in-chief to proceed with his plan of campaign. Roberts of Kandahar did not intend to conduct the war upon the lines previously used by the various commanders. He knew the futility and the folly of hurling infantry at well prepared and difficult positions. He knew from experience, as well as by the insight of an intelligent mind, that any position occupied by an enemy can be made useless to him, and that frequently without striking a blow. On a small scale it had already been seen in this campaign that the enemy would not stand in a position where he must fight at a disadvantage. For instance, if he saw that the attacking force was working round to his rear, so that if he stood and fought his retreat would be cut off; naturally and properly he would evacuate the position and retreat towards his base before the encircling movement was completed.

Lord Roberts intended to employ against the enemy that common sense which, when applied to warlike operations, is called strategy. With the assistance of his chief of staff, he had made his army mobile. He had worked out his plan. Now the time had come to put it into execution.

At the end of January the greater part of the cavalry that had been with French in the neighbourhood of Colesberg was secretly withdrawn—withdrawn in such a way that the Boers had no idea that any such movement had taken place, and by the 5th of February almost the whole of it was at Modder River camp, at which place General French and his staff arrived on that date.

Lord Kitchener reorganised the Cavalry Division into three brigades; the whole being under the command of French. It was a great opportunity for the Silent Cavalryman. His army rank was only that of colonel, though he held the temporary and local rank of lieutenant-general. It was intended at first for the cavalry to make a dash straight on Bloemfontein, but when Lord Roberts arrived at Modder River on the 9th he received the disquieting intelligence that owing to the 94-pounder Creusot gun, Kimberley was at its last gasp; and he promptly resolved to relieve the Diamond City before entering upon his main campaign.

Wherefore on that day (February 9th) he visited the cavalry camp and made an inspection, after which he called together the various commanding officers and told them that they were to be employed upon a service that would rejoice their hearts—namely, the relief of Kimberley. They were to make a dash for it, stopping for nothing. He would support them with the rest of the army as he should find opportunity. Straightway French set to work to organise a flying column, taking

care that everything should be done with the utmost secrecy. The start was delayed for about twenty-four hours in consequence of Babington's Cavalry having been sent to Koodoosberg Drift to assist Macdonald. Next day the whole Cavalry Division, consisting of three brigades, numbering over 2,600 men, together with nearly 1,300 Colonials and mounted infantry and seven batteries horse artillery, was paraded, and five days' supply provided. Every man carried 200 rounds of ammunition, while the guns took 400 rounds each in waggons and transport. There were five per cent. of led horses without saddles; and that night the column was moved out of camp about half a mile to the south. The camp itself was left standing, as though the force had merely gone on a reconnaissance, and was to return the next day or the day after. But at 3 a.m. on the 11th, the whole imposing force, over 4,000 men and horses, struck south and slightly east, to a farm called Ramdam.

Photo:] [*Knight, Aldershot.*

MAJOR-GENERAL BABINGTON.

A glance at the map on p. 573 will show that Ramdam is in the opposite direction from Kimberley, and it would, no doubt, have been a shorter way for the division to move along the road between the Modder and the Riet as far as Jacobsdal, and thence strike north along the main road into Kimberley. But there was this very good reason for not following that route—namely, that the Boers were established in some force at Jacobsdal, and French would have had to clear them out before he could do anything further. And, as we have said, it was the intention of Lord Roberts to beat the enemy not by fighting but by manœuvring.

Meanwhile, on the 10th, a large body of mounted infantry that had been encamped at the Orange River moved into the Free State, and the 7th Division (infantry), under General Tucker, set out from Honeynest Kloof to the same point—namely, Ramdam.

French had to march twenty-two miles to reach this point, and one may gain some insight into the change made in the mobility of the army when one learns that he reached there with his whole force at ten a.m. on the 11th, having taken only seven hours to cover the twenty-two miles. This was first-rate marching, even for cavalry, with such a large body on bad roads and in such a climate. For, be it understood, the larger the force the slower the march. The 9th Division, under General Colvile, and the mounted infantry, pushed on to Ramdam the same day from the Modder and the south, so that on the 11th you have three divisions—French's, Tucker's, and Colvile's—converging on Ramdam from the north and the west, Colvile on French's heels. Hannay's Mounted Infantry was coming up from the south. The 6th Division, under General Kelly-Kenny, was under orders to proceed to Ramdam the next day.

The plan of action was briefly this:—

French, with his mounted force, was to hurry forward in a northerly direction, taking possession of certain drifts on the Riet and the Modder, and then make a detour through a desert country several miles round Cronje's left, which detour would finally bring him into Kimberley on the east side. The infantry divisions were to follow him up at intervals of about one march. Thus the Cavalry Division would make a dash for the drifts on the Riet early on the 12th. Hard on their heels would follow Tucker's 7th Infantry Division, and it was anticipated that French would have time to capture those drifts on the Riet and transport his whole division across the river during the time that it took Tucker to march to the south bank of the stream. While Tucker was marching in the tail of the cavalry, the 6th Division (Kelly-Kenny's) would strike across from Enslin and reach Ramdam just after the last of Tucker's battalions had left it.

The next day French would again move forward to the Modder and seize a drift or several drifts there. Tucker would follow on his heels, ready to take possession of the captured drifts, while French moved on to Kimberley. The 6th Division would march after him to take possession of the camp he had just quitted on the Riet, and the 9th Division under Hannay would come from the Orange River to Ramdam, to take up the quarters previously occupied by the 6th Division.

Thus there would be four separate forces with the cavalry in the van, and the others following in support of him and of each other at the interval of about a day's march, one force arriving at a point immediately that point had been quitted by the force immediately preceding it.

The net result would be that when French would be entering Kimberley, there would be a whole infantry division holding the Modder at a drift about a dozen miles from Modder River camp; another division between the Riet and the Modder, and a third at the Riet, ready to be employed in any movement that might then seem advisable. At any rate, there would be between Cronje and the capital of the Free State a division of infantry, while the cavalry division would be in his rear, and Lord Methuen's troops on his front. Not without reason, it was hoped either to capture Cronje and his whole force at Magersfontein and Spytfontein, or else to compel him to retreat by the one route open—namely to the west, which would drive him further into British territory, and compel him to make a wide detour so as to strike into the Free State or the Transvaal at some point north of Kimberley. Should he attempt a retreat by this line, he would have to run the risk of being cut into by the British cavalry division, which would be situated so as to be able to reach the border, where Cronje must cross, in a shorter time and by a more direct route than that which could be taken by the Boer general.

How Cronje was at first out-manœuvred; how he saw his danger; how he made a bold stroke to escape from the snare, forms a chapter of absorbing interest in the story of the war. The present purpose is merely to show what it was that Lord Roberts contemplated.

On the 11th, three divisions were on the move—namely the cavalry, Tucker's division, and brigades of mounted infantry under Colonel Hannay and Colonel Ridley. As has already been said, the cavalry reached Ramdam at 10 o'clock in the morning of that day, followed several hours later by Tucker's infantry. There was no canvas

for the men, so they all had to lie down in the open air. Luckily there was a good well and a water-pan, or small reservoir, used for purposes of irrigation, so that both horses and men were able to drink.

On the following day the movement on Kimberley really began, for Ramdam was merely a point of concentration. The sun had not yet risen when the réveille sounded, and French's division saddled and mounted for their long ride. Their first objective was the River Riet, which might be crossed by one of two drifts—namely Waterval Drift and Dekiel Drift, which were about two miles apart, the one in a north-easterly and the other in an easterly direction from Ramdam.

Speed was essential, so the force did not march in the ordinary fashion of column—that is with one brigade leading and the other two following on the same route. Instead, they were spread out over a wide extent of country, each brigade following a different road. It was an inspiring sight to see this huge mass of horsemen moving thus in three columns, each column composed of several regiments, and riding along in masses of which each mass was a whole regiment.

On the left Colonel Gordon led the 3rd Brigade. The 9th Lancers led in front in a solid body, behind them the 16th Lancers also in a solid mass ; next came Roberts's Horse, a body of irregulars raised in the Colony ; and behind them Kitchener's Horse. Behind these again came a brigade division of horse artillery.

On the right of Gordon's column was the 1st Brigade, then consisting of three regiments marching one behind the other in the same sort of formation as Gordon's Brigade.

The 1st Brigade was not yet up to full strength, for Colonel Porter, who commanded, had only just arrived with four other regiments at Orange River, whence he was pushing on to Ramdam in hot haste. Porter had under his command the largest body of horse, namely, the 6th Dragoons (Inniskillings), the Scots Greys, the 6th Dragoon Guards (Carabiniers), 2nd Dragoon Guards, and New South Wales Lancers, about as magnificent a body of cavalry as Great Britain ever sent into the field.

The 2nd Cavalry Brigade was now commanded by Broadwood, who had under him the 10th Hussars, 12th Lancers, and the Household Cavalry, and who was on the right of the 1st Brigade.

It was but two hours after midnight when the head of the cavalry column left Ramdam, marched out of camp, formed up in the dark, and waited for the sun to rise. At about 4 a.m. the three columns moved majestically out. They were cumbered by no transport, for French had decided to make a dash for the river and secure a passage first, and then to send back for his convoy. At first the whole division marched straight on Dekiel Drift, almost due east. The River Riet thereabouts runs almost north and south. It was about 8 a.m. when the enemy was first seen—a few Boer horsemen being observed on the left flank and left front.

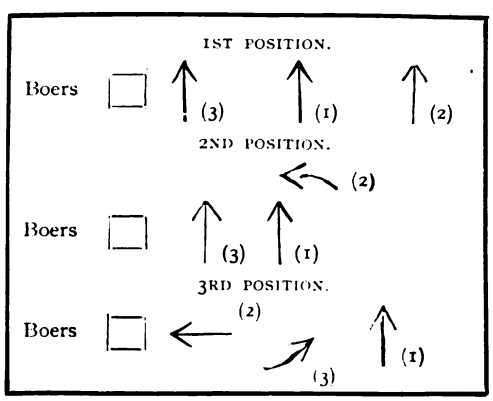
How many are there? Is it only a patrol, or is it the scouts of a large body? Twenty pairs of field-glasses go up to twenty pairs of eyes, and it becomes apparent that the men in sight do not number more than twenty. That is well and good. We will brush right past them, heedless of such little damage as they may do by sniping. We have no time to wait to skirmish with patrols.

But French was soon undeceived. His force moved on to brush past the kopje where the Boers had been seen, when a shell pitched in amongst the horses. It

fell immediately in front of a line ; and the next one, beautifully timed, burst within a yard or two of the general and his staff. Fortunately, no one was hurt ; but it seemed that the Boers were in some force, and had two guns.

So it would not do to ignore them entirely, though to stop and fight them would be merely time wasted. The Silent Cavalryman made his plans in a very few minutes. He swung round Broadwood's Brigade to the left front, with orders to charge and hold some kopjes which would secure the British position. The guns of Colonel Eustace's brigade division of the Royal Horse Artillery unlimbered, and in a very short space of time the British 12-pounders were placing their shells dangerously near to two pieces of the enemy.

But the general had no intention of stopping there until such time as he could drive the Boers off. He knew that even if the enemy did work round on his rear after he had passed, they must reckon with the bayonets of Tucker's division. Wherefore, disposing one division of his cavalry with Eustace's guns to hold the enemy in check in the way described, he wheeled the whole of the rest of his force round and passed on the other side of Broadwood's division. Thus :—



The line occupied by the Boers was on the direct road to Waterval Drift, to the right of which was Dekiel Drift. French decided that he would make a feint attack on Waterval Drift with one brigade, and while the attention of the enemy was thus occupied, he would swoop down upon Dekiel Drift with the other two brigades. The order was sent to Gordon to dash for Waterval Drift at full speed with the 3rd Brigade and to try to force the Drift, but not so as to become heavily engaged. Gordon did as he was commanded, and speedily the 9th and 16th Lancers, followed closely by Roberts's and Kitchener's Horse, might have been seen flying over the rocky ground. The Boers promptly made up their minds that this was the British attack, and they hurried back to positions commanding Waterval Drift with their artillery.

The rest of the division halted about three miles from the river bank to give Gordon's Brigade time to develop its attack. Only the general himself, with his staff and personal escort, rode slowly on to find the proper place and observe the proper moment for the real attack. On the left there soon broke out the sound of heavy and continuous fire. It was Gordon's Brigade in action. The moment had come, and a galloper flew back from French to the 1st Brigade commander with the order to advance straight ahead at the gallop. Instantly that great mass of horsemen was on the move, line after line, squadron after squadron, galloping along as though racing for a prize. And so they were. They were racing in the first heat for the Diamond City as a stake. Ten minutes of it brought the whole brigade to a thin green line that marked the course of the river, and they race on, man and horse, some of them even galloping into the water. But it was at

once seen that the force must find some proper drift, because the first man who rode his horse into the stream found himself up to the girths in sand. So they right-wheeled and cantered down the river bank, expecting every moment that from the green line of bushes on the other side there would break out some fire of rifles and machine guns. But no such greeting awaited the 1st Brigade.

Away on the left still the cannon boomed and the rifles cracked. Behind them they could hear the thundering of the hoofs of the 2nd Brigade and the thousand or more of mounted infantry, but of Boers within shooting distance of themselves never a one. Halt, this spot looks like a drift—there is a road running down to the bank of the stream, and it is apparently continued on the other side. Moreover, the banks are cut away. This must be Dekiel Drift. Somebody ride in and see how deep the water is. Yes, it is the drift indeed, and there is not an enemy in sight. Now some of you Lancers and Dragoons may dash through the water and gallop to those little hills on the other side of the river, and see if there be any foemen there. If so, clear them out. If not, you may dismount and fortify ; for those little hills command the drift, and if we hold them our whole division can cross in safety and bring its baggage too.

The firing on the left grows fainter and fainter. Soon tidings come that Gordon too is on the north bank. He had no such easy passage as we had, but still he is over with slight loss—one officer only killed and two men wounded. A horse artilleryman remarks, "You used to say in the army, 'Shoot like a Heavy Dragoon.' You will soon have to alter it to 'Shoot like a Boer.'" And indeed it seems wonderful that Gordon's cavalry, who charged slap at the drift, and crowded over it in a mass under a continual fire from about 800 rifles and two guns, all within easy range, should not have been decimated.

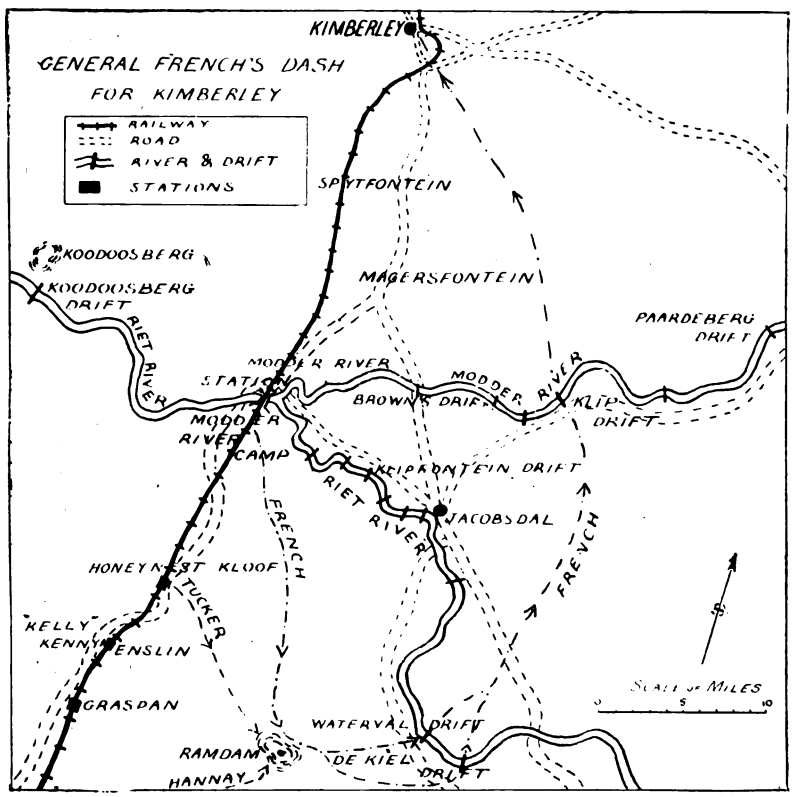
The cavalrymen themselves are inclined to put their slight loss down to the fear with which they inspired the enemy. Certainly a whole brigade of horsemen charging in a body at full speed with lances in rest and sabres flashing is a sight enough to daunt the bravest, and it is not improbable that the Free Staters—who, so far as this particular force was concerned, had never seen a cavalry charge—found it impossible to take steady aim at the galloping troopers. Which proves, as we have said before, that the personal equation still forms some element in the game of war.

Of this there can be no doubt—it is a great day for the cavalry. As officers and men come riding and walking about, taking their horses to water at the river, or themselves drinking the muddy fluid, or gathered round chewing with great appetite, if little relish, the biscuit and bully-beef, they all agree that it is a great day for their arm of the service. They feel elated, as well they might. Before this war, and indeed after it had begun, the men who were the supporters of the Lancer and the Hussar had been told that their day was done. With quick-firing rifles that carried nearly 3,000 yards, not to mention machine-guns that could vomit hundreds of bullets per minute, such a thing as using cavalry for anything except the pursuit of routed and disorganised infantry was altogether out of the question. So said military authorities, both amateur and professional, and Sir Redvers Buller himself, when he named the composition of the 50,000 whom he

would take with him for the campaign, had asked for infantry, infantry, infantry.

The north bank of the Riet was in the hands of General French, and he had command of two excellent crossing places.

It was not until some little time later mounted their ponies and galloped hot foot to the threatened point, to hold it until such time as reinforcements could come up. Had these farmers reached Dekiel before French, the British would certainly have lost heavily, and he might



that the British commander learned by what a narrow margin he had won Dekiel Drift. True, his feint attack by Gordon at Waterval had completely deceived the Dutch commandant; but as soon as the main body put itself well in motion for Dekiel Drift it had been observed by Boer scouts. These gave the alarm at once and a strong party of burghers had have been delayed a day or two in crossing. As it was, the speed of our horses saved the situation. We won the race by just about five minutes.

Five minutes does not seem a very long time in a march of ninety miles; but in this instance it meant the difference between life and death for many a score of women and children in Kimberley.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE MARCH ON KIMBERLEY (*continued*).

WHILE French and Tucker were concentrating on Ramdam from the north-west, Colonel Hannay was hurrying up from the Orange River to the same rendezvous. Hannay had with him a large convoy, containing the greater part of the food for the Kimberley Relief Force.

Setting out from Orange River camp immediately after sunrise, Hannay marched at a fair speed and without interruption for about ten miles. At this point they had to pass along the whole length of a short valley, and here it was they came into collision with the enemy. Hannay would have been glad enough to brush past the enemy in the same way that French brushed past those whom he met between Ramdam and the Riet ; but this was impossible in Hannay's case, because he had his convoy to think of. The Boers had taken possession of a kopje which commanded the whole of the valley, and the mounted infantry were compelled to engage them. The Boers were commanded by Christian De Wet, a Free Stater.

Most of the British force consisted of irregulars, and these were under fire for the first time. Dismounting and leading their horses to cover, the irregulars advanced to the attack with a coolness and a resolution unsurpassed by anything ever shown, even by the Black Watch or the Fighting Fifth. There were ant-heaps and boulders on the ground, and lying down behind these and advancing from cover to cover, the Volunteers made such play with their rifles that the Dutchmen were most unpleasantly astonished. On the British left so skilfully was the advance conducted that the Dutchmen could not see where the firing came from. So they resorted to a device characteristic of the slimness of the worst kind of Boer. Some of their men who had been in advance of the main body had fallen to the rifles of the British, and were now lying dead or wounded on the ground between the opposing sides. So the Dutchmen sent out an ambulance under the Red Cross, with a doctor in command. This medical man advanced towards the British position bearing a white flag. Firing was, of course, immediately stopped, and the officer in command at the point rose to parley with the doctor. Might he carry away his dead ? Certainly he might. And in return, might a few of our men go to the farmhouse over yonder to get water for their comrades, some of whom were wounded ?

The Dutchman agreed to this, collected his dead and wounded, exchanged courteous salutes with the British officer, and retired to his friends. Soon after he had reached their lines, half a company of the mounted infantry set out for the farmhouse to procure the water. When they were at the place, completely isolated from their main body, and in fact out of sight, a detachment of the Dutchmen rushed down from the kopje, cut off the water party, and called upon them to surrender. The

COMMANDEERED: FRENCH'S TROOPS AFTER A FORAGING EXPEDITION.

little band replied by making a dash through them; but they were seriously outnumbered, and in the end an officer and ten men were made prisoners.

Even worse than this—and it is difficult to conceive any conduct more treacherous—the Boer doctor, who by all the rules of civilised warfare was bound to preserve absolute secrecy as to anything he had discovered of our movements or position, told his friends what they did not know before, namely, the position of the British left. The result was that a gun was turned on our men, shelling them with great accuracy, though fortunately without inflicting much damage.

All that afternoon the firing went on, and the mounted infantry wriggled its way by inches towards the summit of the hill. The firing was of the kind to which we had now become accustomed. The marksmen on both sides took every advantage of every bit of cover that could be obtained, and only fired when they could do so without the chance of being hit.

There was one of Hannay's men, a crack shot, who, as he expressed it himself, had "a day out." He managed to wriggle up to a spot about 300 yards from the Dutchmen; and he procured unto himself a couple of big stones which he rolled together and placed side by side on the top of a very slight mound of earth. He left a crack big enough to accommodate the muzzle of his rifle between the stones; and, lying behind his bulwark in the utmost security, he kept a sharp look-out ahead. A felt hat appeared above a boulder. Crack went the Lee-Metford, and the slouch hat disappeared. For half an hour the marksman lay behind his fortification watching. Then another slouch hat appeared above a stone sangar. Crack, again, and the British marksman had two to his bag. For two hours and a half he was lying there, waiting and watching, and during that time six Dutchmen fell to his fatal rifle. The Boers had marked him down and blazed away at him constantly, and it would have gone hard with him if one of them had been able to shoot into the crack. But hurry or nerves, or something of the kind, spoilt the aim of the burghers, and this deadly sharpshooter escaped without a scratch.

When darkness fell it found the Boers still on the summit of the kopje. But they were in a position of great danger; for Hannay's men had skirmished with skill and determination to within 200 yards of them. "Wait till dark, my lads, and then we will try them with a rush." So the irregulars stretched themselves on the ground for rest, and contentedly munched their hard biscuits and drank what was left of the hot water in their waterbottles (it had been cold water when they started). At about 8 o'clock a scout appeared before Colonel Hannay with the news that the Boers had trekked, taking their guns with them. There was no doubt about it, because he had crawled to the top of the hill to look. There was a good deal of wet on the stones, which he judged to be blood, so that probably the Republicans had had enough of it. Anyhow, they had evacuated the position.

Assured of this, Hannay promptly gave orders to move on with the convoy. The men wanted a night's rest bad enough, for they had had a hard day's work. But there was no time to think of resting. "Bobs's" orders were to hurry on to Ramdam at the highest speed of man and horse. So the oxen lumbered on in the dark, with the victorious mounted infantry ahead of them, pressing on. What movement was afoot they, of course, did not

know. But they knew that their commander-in-chief had ordered them to make good speed, and they did not intend to disappoint him.

While French was making his swoop on the Riet, the 6th Division was marching out from Enslin across country to Ramdam (see Map, p. 573).

At the same time the 7th Division, which had been at Ramdam with French the previous day, was following the Cavalry Division at such pace as it could make; and at 9 p.m. that night it arrived at Dekiel Drift.

Photo:] [*Knight, Aldershot.*

GENERAL KELLY-KENNY.

The rear guard of the 7th Division had hardly left Ramdam when the advance guard of the 6th Division arrived there, so that the movement of the forces on Monday, February the 12th, was as follows:—

1 p.m. — French's Division seized Dekiel and Waterval Drifts and crossed the Riet.

1 p.m. — The 6th Division (Kelly-Kenny's) arrived at Ramdam from Enslin.

9 p.m.—The 7th Division (Tucker's) arrived at Dekiel Drift and encamped south of the Riet.

Hannay's mounted infantry marched all day towards Ramdam.

The rest of the 12th was spent by the Cavalry Division in pushing forward piquets to the north, and in endeavouring to procure decent drinking water for the troops. Failing in their search, the men were obliged to fall back upon the river water, of which they, in their extreme thirst, drank copiously, muddy and unclean as the river was. They bivouacked that night on the north bank, waiting anxiously for their supply column to reach them, but it had somehow been delayed in starting until 4 o'clock in the afternoon, and did not reach French until 4 a.m. on the 13th.

Having "stoked up," as the men called it, the brigades paraded at 10.30 a.m., ready for the next stage of the march. Porter, with the rest of his brigade, came in about an hour and a half before this, but he had come from Orange River by forced marches, and was utterly unable to take his horses along with the rest of the column, so he encamped on the north bank of the Riet, promising to follow the next day. In the terrible heat the division started for the Modder, again in three columns, marching this time not with whole regiments in mass, but simply with squadrons in mass and intervals between the squadrons. You will see that the result of this would be to make the column much longer than it had been the day before.

This day's work was to be a dash on the Modder River, with intent to seize a drift there—preferably Klip Drift, about twenty-five miles distant. And in order that the march might be the speediest possible, French took care not to encumber his force with anything more than was absolutely necessary. No supply waggons of any kind were taken, nor any other transport, except a little spare ammunition for the artillery, so that the

force was ready and able, if necessary, to go the whole way at full speed. As on the previous day, the supply column was left behind, with instructions to be ready to move on immediately word should be sent that a passage across the Modder had been secured.

This was a most trying march. It is well known to all who have had experience of tropical and sub-tropical climates, that active work ought to be done immediately after sunrise, because after the sun has been up for six or seven hours the heat is almost unbearable. And General French would, if he had been able, have set out from his camp on the Riet at 4 o'clock in the morning. But the delay in the arrival of the supply column had prevented this. Under the circumstances many a general would have called a halt and waited until the early evening, but French had been ordered to get through to Kimberley and to stop for nothing. So the 4,000 and odd horsemen trotted on and on through the most terrible heat of the day. The noonday sun blistered them. Dust storms blew and choked men and horses ; still they rode on. Men reeled in their saddles, sick with the heat ; still they rode on. Horses dropped by the way. Their riders simply shifted saddles and accoutrements to the led animals and rode on.

There is no instance before this of a march of twenty miles or more being undertaken in such a climate during the hottest part of the day. But the squat, grim general trotted on ahead as unconcerned and as steadily as if he had been riding in the Park on an English summer's morning. To add to the other discomforts, the country was very barren and sandy, and not a drop of water was to be had. Straight as the country would let him, French headed for Klip Drift ; his squadrons trotted behind him with the guns of the Horse Artillery at the extreme flanks, and a fringe of scouts spread out in the shape of an open fan, well ahead of the front of the column. It is noon, and we have done about six miles. Is there no water in this accursed country ? One would give a year's pay for a mouthful of the dirtiest water out of the dirtiest horse-pond one ever saw.

What is that on the left ? Patrols come galloping back from the van. Enemy on the left and left-front. Now you men of the Horse Artillery, you must hold them. We have no time to stop and discourse with them as we should like to. Keep them at arm's length while the column makes a detour and slips round them.

Half a dozen 12-pounders limber up, dash to favourable positions, unlimber, load and pitch shells into a low ridge of kopjes running in the shape of half a horse-shoe on the left and left-front. A few men remain behind, as escort to the guns, while the rest of the column majestically sweeps to the right and round again to the left, striking the road about two miles miles higher up. For about an hour the Horse Gunners bombard the kopjes, with what result no one can say, though there is the usual gunner who swears that he dropped a shell into a whole squadron of them at 3,500 yards, and distinctly saw men and horses swept away. This is as it may be.

On and still on. "There is my horse down. No wonder, poor devil. He has had hardly any forage and only two mouthfuls of mud and water since yesterday morning, and the sun has smitten him, and the dust has choked him ever since. He must be left here, a prey to the

vultures, the horse that was a comrade to me. Fain would I stay and minister to him, but there are women and children in Kimberley who beckon with the peremptory hand of weakness."

Six hours and a half of that awful heat and grind and thirst—then there appears on the horizon a belt of green. It is the line of bushes and trees on the banks of the Modder. How far do you make it? Well, it looks about five miles. Forward the guns; but the guns are not at hand. They have been left behind. The heat and the pace have been too much for some of their horses, and there has been delay every time a new animal had to be harnessed to the limber. An orderly and a galloper back to Colonel Eustace to tell him to gallop his batteries to the front, if he breaks the neck of every horse in his teams. The rest of the column slackened the pace somewhat, whilst the guns are hurrying to the front; and then in majestic array they swoop down on the river together. Scouts have crept forward and come back with the welcome news that a Boer laager is on the other bank, and they evidently are not expected.

At about 2,500 yards two batteries unlimber and open fire. Great the consternation in the laager. The Boers can tell that many guns are trained upon them, and they do not know what to make of it. If any British force was out, they would have expected it to arrive early in the morning, for they do not believe that even the British are mad enough to make a march across the sandy desert in the heat of the South African noon-day.

Forward the 12th Lancers. Trot! And for about a mile that dashing regiment makes good pace over the sand, despite the fact that every step the horses sink over the fetlocks. It is about 400 yards now to the drift. A bugle blows, and, like a thunderbolt, the whole regiment charges in a solid mass at the drift. Down the steep bank they rush, into the water, through, and over, and up the bank, and now they are into the first laager. A dropping, scattered fire greets them, and one man is hit by a bullet. But the regiment—in scattered groups now—heads madly for the waggons of the Boer encampment. Shaggy-looking farmers mount weedy ponies and gallop off. There is another laager 200 yards to the east, and another a quarter of a mile to the north. The shouts of the Lancers have given notice to the column behind that the drift is won, and in triumph the great body of cavalry bears down upon the drift. As to the Boers, their surprise has been complete, and they have fled ignominiously, blessing their stars that the "men with the pointed sticks" and the "men with the long knives" cannot catch them up by reason of the weariness of their horses.

The passage of Klip Drift proves no easy matter, for the banks are steep on both sides, and slippery to boot; and after some thousand hoofs have trodden the ground, the taking-off place and the landing place become slippery, slimy quagmires. Two other regiments follow the 12th across. There is loot, much loot. Three laagers, with heaps of biltong and much bread, and bacon and other supplies, which are luxuries to the worn-out, hungry cavalry division. By six o'clock in the evening the whole of the 2nd Brigade is firmly established on the north of the drift, while Gordon's Brigade has trotted by the river and occupied Rondeval Drift and two other minor crossings. A good feed is enjoyed from the captured supplies, and then horses are led to water, piquets established, and the

horsemen throw themselves on the ground and sleep as only weary men can.

The most dangerous part of the operations has now been carried out. The Riet and the Modder have been seized, opening a way to Kimberley for the whole army. While French's Division was performing its toilsome march from the Riet to the Modder, the infantry divisions behind were gradually moving up in their order. As has been said, Tucker's Division had followed hard on French's heels to Dekiel, and had encamped on the near bank the same night. Tucker spent the 13th in crossing the river, and in establishing himself on the north bank. Kelly-Kenny, who had arrived at Ramdam on the 12th, set out at 5 a.m. on the 13th to Waterval Drift—the ford which, as you will remember, Gordon's Brigade had used the previous day—and he arrived there at 11 a.m. He spent the rest of the day in crossing the stream. Behind him the 9th Division and the mounted infantry, under Hannay and Ridley, with the convoy, were moving from the south, and they marched into Ramdam at noon. So that on the 13th, the third day of the operation, you have the forces thus disposed :—

French at Klip Drift and Rondeval Drift, in command of the Modder.

Kelly-Kenny rather more than a day's march behind him at Waterval Drift on the Riet.

Tucker also on the Riet at Dekiel Drift.

The 9th Division with the mounted infantry and convoy at Ramdam, a day's march behind Tucker and Kelly-Kenny.

On Wednesday, the 14th, French halted his division at the Modder. This was a matter of the direst necessity, for though the men were both willing and able to continue the march, the horses were absolutely done up by the heat and want of forage and water. Moreover, it was necessary to leave the drift in British hands, and French could not spare a man. Wherefore the cavalry general decided to stay for twenty-four hours and rest, gathering strength for his final swoop.

The other divisions, however, did not tarry. Kelly-Kenny set out an hour after midnight (1 a.m., February 14th) to a place called Wegdraai, about half-way between Waterval Drift and Klip Drift. He had with him the heavy naval guns, and these, with their teams of thirty-two oxen to a gun, could only make comparatively slow progress. The plan was for the 6th Division to reach Klip Drift that night or early the next morning, so as to take over that drift when the cavalry general should push on to Kimberley. The march was a splendid one, for the whole division had covered the nine and a quarter miles between the Riet and Wegdraai by 11 a.m. At the same moment, the rest of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade was hurrying on from Dekiel Drift, following the road taken by the main body of the cavalry division in order to join in the last march, and had arrived at 4 p.m.

The 7th Division moved up the bank of the Riet from Dekiel Drift to Waterval, to occupy the ground vacated by the 6th Division, while the 9th Division and the mounted infantry marched from Ramdam to the same spot.

Kelly-Kenny rested his men for six hours at Wegdraai. Then they munched a dog biscuit and started to trudge across the desert to join the cavalry. Their march was, of course, not so arduous in some respects as French's march had been on the previous day ; for they had rested during the heat, and were marching in the

"THE MEN WITH THE LONG KNIVES WERE AMONGST US."—*Quotation from a Boer Letter.*

cool of the evening. Nevertheless, it was a magnificent proof of the quality of British infantry; for the distance they set themselves to cover in the twenty-four hours was something like twenty miles. And for infantry, even in an European country, twenty miles in a day is a forced march. But the troops, so far from complaining, took the whole business in the most cheerful spirit. They were eight regiments in all; the Oxford, the Gloucester, the West Ridings and the Buffs were brigaded together under General Knox, forming the 13th Brigade, and the Essex, Welsh, Warwick and Yorkshire Regiments composed the 18th, under Colonel Stephenson. They swung along at a steady pace, as daylight faded into twilight, and twilight into darkness; these men from every district of England, resolved, one and all, to march until they dropped, if only they could get level with Cronje and square that long-standing account with him. They did not know exactly what the move was. Some thought they were marching on Bloemfontein; others thought they were outflanking Cronje, with intent to attack him in the Magersfontein stronghold. But they all knew that "Bobs' would not set them a-marching in this fashion unless there were game afoot. So they trudged on, mile after mile, footsore and heavy laden, but light-hearted, giving the lie to those who had said that the British infantryman was no longer the man he had been when Wellington led him from Torres Vedras to Bayonne. And an hour after midnight they swung into French's camp on the Klip, having marched, naval guns and all, over twenty miles in twenty-three hours.

French and his division had been resting and recuperating somewhat, but the Boers had not altogether left them in peace. Shells dropped intermittently into the camp. And every now and then a troop of Boer mounted men would be seen galloping as though to make an attack on some part of the British position. But the Horse Artillery soon silenced the fire of the Dutchmen's cannon, and the burghers who menaced us retired in hot haste as soon as ever a regiment of Lancers moved out to meet them.

The only gain and loss was that some of our horses lost the rest they much needed, which was, of course, some little gain to the Boers. The Artillery horses were particularly knocked up; for they had been dragging their loads since Sunday, frequently being obliged to gallop into position along the line of route, and then, when the guns had done their work, to limber up and hurry after the column.

When Thursday morning broke, French found himself so short of horses for his batteries that he was obliged to take transport horses and harness them to the limbers, whilst the supply of spare mounts for the troopers had been altogether exhausted. But these facts were not allowed to interfere with the progress of the force. French had promised the commander-in-chief to be in Kimberley that night (February 15th), and he was bound to keep his word at all risks and all hazards. Wherefore, at 9 a.m., the whole Cavalry Division, with the mounted infantry attached to them and the seven Horse Batteries, paraded, eager to start upon the last stage of their journey.

CHAPTER XLVII.

A CONVOY LOST AND A TOWN WON.

WHILE French was making his last rush across the desert, the other parts of the army were performing the operations necessary to complete Lord Roberts's plan. For the relief of Kimberley was only one part of that plan. The rest included two main objects—namely, the cutting off of Cronje's army from his base and the capture of it at Magersfontein, and a rapid march on Bloemfontein by the cavalry and other mounted troops, in much the same sort of way that the march on Kimberley had been accomplished.

On Thursday (February 15th) the 6th Division rested at Klip Drift, waiting for the convoy and for news that French had broken through into Kimberley, preparatory to marching on the Diamond City themselves, thus relieving the cavalry for the dash on Bloemfontein.

But there were Boers between the Riet and the Modder, especially at Jacobsdal, and before the whole army could make another march forward it was necessary to drive out, or kill, or capture the enemy there. Otherwise they might hang upon our rear, cut off convoys, and generally play havoc with communications. Wherefore the 7th Division, which had gathered at Waterval Drift on the 14th, split, the next morning, into two, the 15th Brigade with the mounted infantry of the division moving on Jacobsdal, and the 14th marching as far as Wegdraai.

At the same time the 9th Division, with the mounted infantry of Hannay and Ridley, who had also arrived at Waterval on the 14th, moved on the 15th on the heels of Kelly-Kenny towards Klip Drift. The mounted infantry arrived first, a long way ahead of the 9th Division, and, indeed, had reached Klip Drift before General French left that morning.

Thus the whole army was in motion between the Riet and Kimberley, all except the convoy, which was moving up from immediately south of the Riet under the charge of a small rearguard (consisting of about two hundred mounted infantry), a company of Gordons, and some of the Army Service Corps, the whole commanded by Colonel Johnston. The convoy was an enormous one, consisting of hundreds of waggons drawn by oxen, containing food that was to last the army during the whole of its march from Kimberley to Bloemfontein, excepting only a few days' provisions that were conveyed along with each division. Some idea of the size of it and the value of it may be obtained when it is stated that £100,000 worth of goods were loaded in those waggons.

The cumbrous train reached the south side of Waterval Drift, and drew up ready for the crossing. The first few waggons—rather more than a score—had crossed to the north bank, and several others were in the water when a gun boomed from a kopje just to the north, and crash came a shell into the leading team of oxen. Hardly had this shell burst when another

whizzed from another kopje on the right of the first. It was only too well aimed, for it dropped in the middle of another team. Then a perfect torrent of shells flew into the convoy. It was pitiful to see the poor patient bullocks as the cruel bullets and splinters struck and gashed them. The gear was smashed, the teams were mown down ; for the target was a big and broad one, and the Boer gunners, even if they had been less skilful than they were, could hardly miss the mark. The tiny guard spread out in semicircular form, and advanced in skirmishing order to meet the enemy. But the Boers outnumbered them by at least five to one, nor had Johnston a single piece of artillery with which to reply to their cannonade.

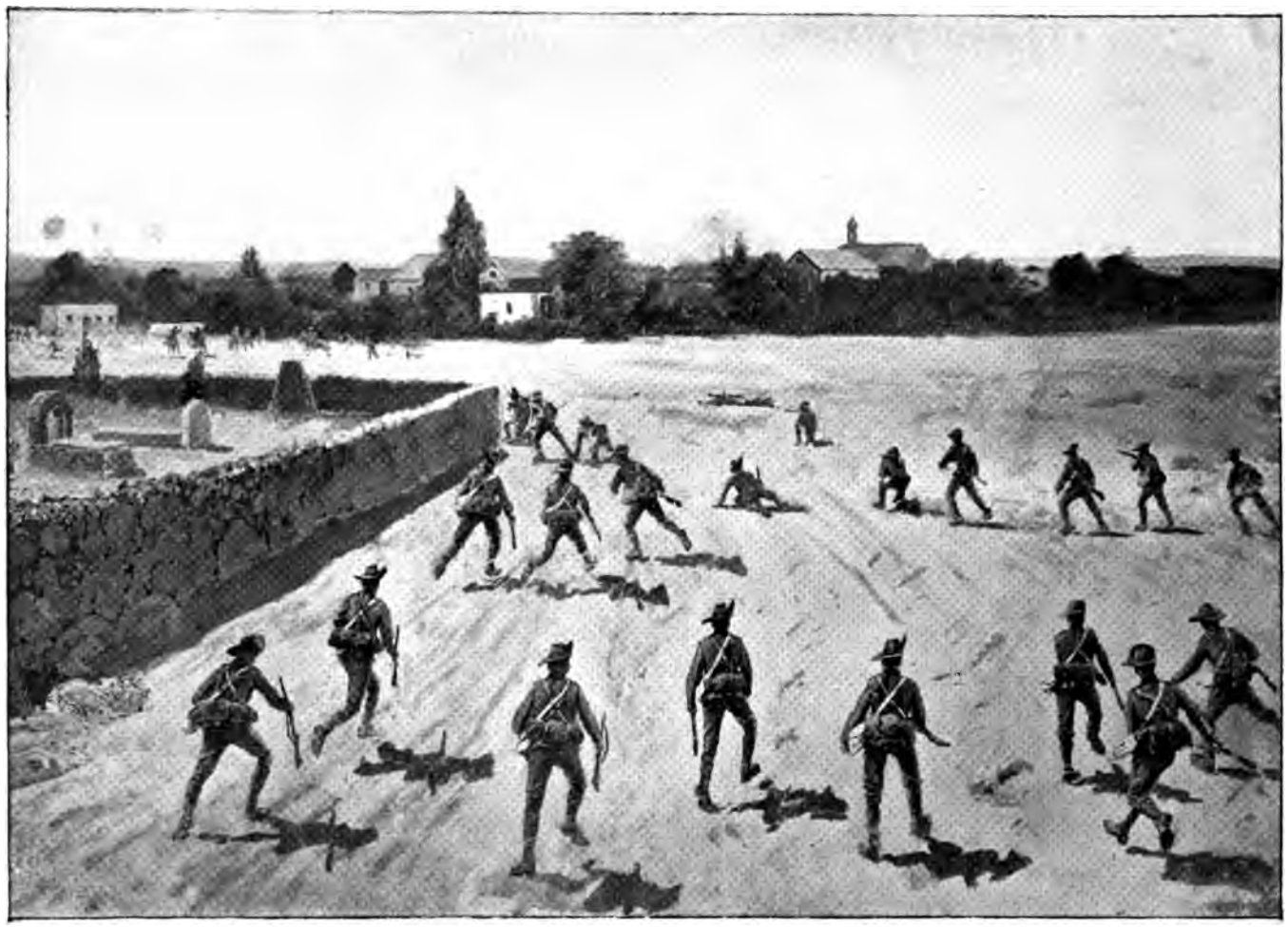
Christian De Wet was much too wily to turn his guns on to the guard. He detached a body of riflemen to meet these, and continued hour after hour to mow down the oxen and smash the convoy to pieces. The situation was serious, for Johnston was carrying the very life of the army. He resolved, therefore, to attempt nothing more than to hold the enemy in check until such time as reinforcements could be sent to him from one of the divisions now ahead. So he despatched riders to Wegdraai, asking for assistance.

Lord Roberts promptly sent the Scottish Borderers and a battery of field artillery, who arrived on the scene only to find the convoy pounded to pieces—a total wreck.

By this time Lord Roberts had moved with his staff to Wegdraai, and established his headquarters there ; and immediately he became acquainted with the state of affairs, he resolved on a daring stroke. Time was too precious, he said, for him to waste in rescuing his transport. The army must push on, food or no food. And as it would have taken a day or two to repair the wrecked convoy, he ordered it to be abandoned to the enemy, and commanded the guard and the reinforcements to follow on immediately. This they did as soon as night fell, abandoning to the enemy 200 waggons, and the greater part of the food of the army. This was De Wet's first exploit.

While this untoward incident was in process of happening, the 15th Brigade and mounted infantry of the 7th Division pushed on to Jacobsdal, under General Wavell, and arrived there at about 1 p.m. It was soon perceived that before the town was taken there would be some fighting ; for it was defended by about 500 Boers entrenched on the ridges round about in positions of great defensive strength. Now, there were with General Wavell several companies of the City Imperial Volunteers, the men whom London had sent forth to fight the battles of the Empire.

Hearts beat high with courage and the exultation of war when the word came "Imperials to the front." The volunteers trotted forward in open order and with the steadiness of veterans ; proud, as well they might be, for they were the first of the English volunteers to fire a shot in this campaign. As they rode on with the 15th Brigade marching steadily behind them, they soon came within sight of the Boer position, which formed an arc with the horns outward ; and it was at the centre of this arc that the City Imperial Volunteers were ordered to ride. They pressed on eagerly and swiftly, and were well within the arc before they came under fire. Then one shot rang out from the front, and a bullet spattered in front of a horse's legs. That shot was a signal ; for hardly had its echo died away when there burst from the ridges in front, to right and to left, a furious fusillade converging on the bold



THE C.I.V.'S AT JACOBSDAL.

volunteers. It was their first fight, and they were in a place hot enough to satisfy anybody. They were being fired on from three sides at once ; a converging fire of musketry of the most dangerous kind. Two horses fell, and immediately the order came, "Dismount." Throwing themselves from their saddles, the C.I.V.'s loaded. Many a hand must have trembled, and many a face paled under the tan. But it was the palor not of fear but of hope, and of nervousness lest they should not do credit to their City and their corps.

"Independent! Commence!" And London's freemen had opened the battle. But they were in a false position. They were too far forward ; and the order soon came to mount and retire. They leapt to their saddles, but retirement was impossible. The Boer marksmen had the range now, and a man on horseback is an easy target. Two men fell, and then the commanding officer countermanded his order, and once more the volunteers dismounted, took cover, and fired at the entrenchments on the kopjes. The infantry had come up to within about 300 yards of them in support, and the C.I.V.'s had to lie low.

Bullets whistled overhead from four sides now. The Boers were firing from right and left and front, and the British infantry from behind. It required no little nerve and steadiness for the men in front to keep cool and take aim under such circumstances. But the C.I.V.'s came out of the ordeal well. No veterans could have behaved more steadily.

Now the 15th Brigade began to advance, crawling from ant-heap to ant-heap, from mound to mound, from stone to stone, a crowd of brown-clad figures almost invisible against the brown earth. A battery limbered up, dashed forward, unlimbered, and started to hurl shrapnel at the ridges ; and under cover of the artillery the brigade pushed on nearer and nearer to the kopjes. A few of the C.I.V.'s who had been kept in reserve as scouts, worked round to the east of the town and reported that here the enemy seemed weaker. "A battalion to the left." And the Boers perceive that the British will take no denial, for they are pressing on in the centre and on the left. The khaki lines draw closer and closer, and the Boer marksmen find that the *rooineks* can shoot. The man who shows his head above the parapet of an entrenchment finds himself the mark of a dozen rifles, for the City Imperials and the 15th Brigade are fighting to win, and aim as steadily as at the butts.

The Boers present at Jacobsdal had the assistance of Count Adalberg Sternberg, an officer of the Austrian army, and of Colonel de Villebois Mareuil, a dashing Frenchman ; and these two foreigners fought with a bravery more than equal to the sternest burgher of them all. The khaki line was now advancing like a flood, regardless of the fire from the entrenchments, advancing slowly and majestically after the time-honoured fashion of British infantry. The Free Staters, who formed the larger part of the garrison, began to be dismayed, and their officers demanded a retreat, but the few Transvaal burghers scorned the suggestion and resolved to fight to the bitterest end.

On came the brown line, steadily, nearer and nearer, until the Free Staters, terrified by the advance of that overwhelming host, inspanned their oxen and horses and fled from the place. Only a few of the stern men from across the Vaal remained to contest the position at all hazards.

But they were too few to stay the march of the 5,000 British infantry. Closer and closer drew the 15th Brigade and the

mounted infantry, until no more than 200 yards separated them from the trenches held by the enemy.

"Fix bayonets! Charge!" General Wavell said a word to a lad by his side. The boy put bugle to lips and blew a note. Then other trumpets sounded, and with one mighty heave the whole line broke into the double and flew across the steep ground. With desperate bravery the handful of stern farmers who manned the trenches and the sangars fired until the British steel was at their throats. Then they threw down their arms and surrendered, or fled to the kloof where their ponies stood, and rode hard to Cronje. Sternberg and Villebois Mareuil, seeing that all was lost, mounted and rode also, taking to the Boer general the unwelcome tidings that his left flank was turned, that the British had entered Jacobsdal at bayonet point, had captured the hospital, the stores, and many men there, and that now it was time for some decisive move to be taken.

And Wavell rode into Jacobsdal, leading the 15th Brigade and the City Imperial Volunteers, who, flushed with success, were now sent out in pursuit of the flying enemy. The Volunteers had the greatest credit of the day, and, as they rode to their appointed camp, the whole brigade cheered them to the echo. And a lance corporal of the C.I.V. captured a Free State flag, which hangs in the Guildhall to this day for a memorial. Tommy Atkins is a conservative sort of man, and he distrusts profoundly those whom he pronounces "bloomin' amatoors." But by this time he knew the C.I.V. to be no drawing-room soldiers. He recognised that these "kid-glove gentry" were ready to take their share of wounds, of death, and of marching, and that, although they might not wheel so beautifully or march with such perfect precision as himself, yet in battle they were comrades true and bold.

That afternoon Lord Roberts moved his headquarters from Wegdraai to Jacobsdal, and he had not long arrived there when the welcome news came that French had entered Kimberley.

All things seemed to go well. With the one exception of the loss of the convoy, every detail of the great and complicated movement of an enormous force had been carried out with the precision of a perfect machine.

And a first-class general is not merely the man who can cause his troops to fight; he is the man who can move them along. Napoleon gained more glory by his passage of the Alps than by Austerlitz and Jena. It was the marching of the army in the Peninsula, even more than its fighting, that won fame for Wellington. And Lord Roberts himself had gained the admiration of the world by his tremendous march from Cabul to Kandahar. A great general fights with the legs of his men as much as with their arms. Hitherto there had been no great general in the field on the British side in the Boer campaign. But one had appeared now, and he was beginning to show the Dutchmen that he could discount their much-vaunted mobility, and could slap infantry along at as great a pace as they themselves could march when mounted.

The night of the 15th of February found the British forces placed thus:—The Cavalry Division at Kimberley; the 6th Division with Kitchener and Kelly-Kenny at Klip Drift; the 9th Division and Hannay's mounted infantry also at Klip Drift; half the 7th Division at Jacobsdal with the headquarters of the Army; the other half of the 7th Division (14th Brigade) at Wegdraai on the way to Jacobsdal.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE RELIEF OF KIMBERLEY.

AS General French assembled his horsemen at nine o'clock on Thursday, the 15th of February, the morning sun shone down on a busy scene. On the south bank of the Klip the 6th Division, aroused from too short a slumber, was making everything in readiness to cross to the other bank, to take the place of the horsemen when these should march out.

MAJOR RIMINGTON OF THE "TIGERS" ON HIS FAVOURITE PONY.

The men of the Naval Brigade, with the willing and able help of the Canadian Regiment, were hauling their pet monsters over the drift. Kitchener, who had arrived with Kelly-Kenny in front of the 6th Division, was holding conferences, long and earnest, with the Silent Cavalryman. The lean brown men on lean bony horses chewed their moustaches and swore with impatience. The Horse Gunners, casting glances askance at the tremendous engines of the sailors, tested spring and breech-block of the little 12-pounders, and tightened a buckle here, a belt there.

The fateful day had arrived. Now British brains and valour would be pitted in a decisive struggle against Dutch slimness and obstinacy. Now the cavalry arm must succeed wholly, or else prove itself a useless and worthless weapon in

modern warfare—good for nothing except to cut up fugitives.

The three brigades of cavalry were drawn up in masses, not of regiments this time, but of whole brigades. And behind them were massed Colonial horsemen, irregulars, cavalry and mounted infantry stalwart and hardy. They faced direct towards Kimberley, and had the whole of the seven artillery batteries on the left. Broadwood was on the left, Porter in the centre, and Gordon on the right. Broadwood and Gordon sent out on either flank patrols to cover the flanks, and shortly after 9 a.m. the whole division set out at a steady but slow trot. They took not an ounce of supplies with them except three days' rations of bully-beef and biscuits, carried by each one, from general to bugler in his haversack.

For about four miles or so the brigade advanced without interruption, and then a gun on the left began to pitch shells into our main body. A galloper to the artillery! and a battery of Horse Gunners moves off to speak with the enemy. The Dutch gunners did exactly what French expected them to do—that is, they stopped shelling the column and began to reply to the battery.

Now another gun booms from the front —another battery out here ; and a battery of Horse Gunners wheel across the front of the column and pitch shells into the kopje where the enemy have taken up position. There must be some considerable force, for they would not be likely to send out two guns with mere patrols. And hark! there is another of them opening on the right front.

It is quite evident that if we are going to relieve Kimberley to-day, there must be no hesitation. Quick, an order to Gordon to clear those kopjes on the right front, whence riflemen are annoying the column. Two gallopers fly from Gordon's Staff. Two trumpets blow. And the 9th and 12th Lancers dash full speed at the stronghold. The 12th ride slap at it, while the 9th gallop obliquely across the front and up a less steep ascent that will bring them to the top of the Boers' ridge. Clearly there are plenty of marksmen on the kopje. They have built sangars of stone ; they have dug out shelter trenches. As the lines of horsemen tear along, the very horses, skeletons as they are, revivify with the sound of the trumpet and the breath of the battle. The Boers fire and fire until the whole ridge of kopjes seems alive with the crackle of their rifles.

But the Lancers mean to press home. They are drunk with the lust of the charge. Their lances seem to quiver in their hands as shorter and shorter grows the space between them and the trenches. Five hundred yards—one hundred, and still the musketry blazes and crackles, and here goes down a horse and there a rider. Now we are on them. And a mighty shout goes up as the British horsemen level lances and draw sabres and charge down upon the brown-bearded farmers. These shriek with rage and fear, fire once more, and then, throwing down their Mausers, shout for mercy. But it is too late. The charge is now in its fullest impetus, and the riders cannot stop their horses if they would. So the lances drink blood, and the tattered shirts of the farmers grow red, and some turn and flee to where the horses are tethered. They mount and ride, but the pointed sticks pierce many a broad back. Lucky it is for the burghers that the Lancers' horses are weary ; else not one Boer could escape.

There is a fellow, rather better-looking than most of his comrades. He is probably

one of the South-African-Dutch aristocracy, one of the Dutoits, or the De Villiers, or the Bothas. He is mounted on a blood horse, a noble beast. Calmly, even contemptuously, he awaits the coming of the Lancers. Dropping the reins on his horse's neck, he raises his rifle and fires thrice, and then, seeing that his men are demoralised and that he, single-handed, cannot stay the tide, turns his horse's head, trusting in the fleetness of his steed. But it is too late. A Lancer, at whom he has fired twice, pursues him, lifting his weary horse along by the sheer strength of his fury. And the Dutchman and his horse roll over, the man pierced through and through; and, as the Lancer careers madly forward, his lance breaks and the head sticks in the wound.

So much won; so much ground gained. But the Boers on this ridge were not the main body—that is posted on those hills on the front of the left. Between the two lots of kopjes occupied by them is the beginning of a long, wide, level plain. General French, as his habit is, rides forward to reconnoitre for himself, leaving the division standing still, with the enemy's rifle fire and shells buzzing round. The Silent Cavalryman does not take long to grasp the position. There is just room for his division to squeeze through between the two sets of kopjes. They will be enfiladed from two sides if they try it; but the enemy's fire will doubtless be subdued somewhat by the seven batteries of Horse guns. The decision is soon made, and gallopers fly back to the brigade commanders. This is no time for fancy manœuvring—the women and children of Kimberley are dying every hour.

So the astounding order comes—astounding because such an order has never been given since the Crimean War. That order is "Charge!" French has made up his mind to force a passage between the two Boer forces on his front and his flank by a charge of his whole division *en masse*.

Bugles blow. Light horsemen and heavy dig in the spur and tighten the rein, and 4,000 horsemen at full gallop propel themselves at the defile. It is a magnificent sight, the most magnificent yet seen in the war. It is a bold and daring move—a move such as few leaders would have the audacity to make.

But audacity is sometimes the highest prudence. The cavalry commander has seen that the level ground between the kopjes is hardly held at all, and that a swift and unexpected dash, covered by the fire of the artillery, will take the column through, not only more quickly, but with far less loss than would a series of flanking attacks on the enemy's positions. That is why he has hurled his whole column at the gap.

Spur, spur! For the safety of a city hangs on the speed of your horses. "Up, you brute—damn you!" Yet the trooper who curses his charger thus loves the beast. But this is no time for stumbling Clank! Clank! The scabbards rattle. Every man sits down in the saddle; and his heels grow bloody. Dully the hoof-beats sound on the soft sand. Spur, spur!

Five miles hard galloping without drawing rein. The men are hot. Sweat pours from their faces. Their clothes are wet through. Their breath comes in hot, fierce gasps. They long for a foe to slay. The Carabiniers and Scots Greys in the van perceive a few riflemen blazing away from behind ant-heaps. They perceive them; but only as one perceives the berries on a bush when one is flying along the line in the Flying Scotsman. On speeds the column at maddest pace,

straight as an arrow. Then a trumpeter blows, and as one man the right and centre halt. "I believe I stuck one," says a Lancer; "but I do not seem to remember." Yet the point of his lance was red.

The charge has been entirely successful. So unexpected was it, so furious the pace and so formidable the appearance of that huge body, galloping at the charge, that the Boer riflemen did not bring down more than fifteen men and horses; which proves that their nerves must have been shaken to pieces, for they had an enormous mass for a target. The Horse Artillery, with a small escort, is five miles behind, blazing away manfully, and pitching shell after shell amongst the trenches and the sangars of the Dutchmen. Broadwood's Brigade, on the left, galloped on when the rest of the column drew rein—galloped like fiends for some kopjes commanding the ground where French now is. And here and there a Boer, who, more valiant than the rest, remained to face the dreaded horsemen in brown, is found with his head split by a sabre, or his breast pierced by a lance. Then the Horse Artillery limber-up and gallop too. Not all at once, but in alternate batteries, retiring and covering each other.

Look ahead! Do you see those two tall chimneys and those huge mounds of earth? That is Kimberley. It is still ten miles away, but we have relieved it now, for the country between us and it is almost flat, and we can cleave the encircling lines at any point we choose.

There is plenty of sun—too much sun, in fact. Let a signalling party go to the top of yonder kopje and flash a message to Kekewich. Tell him that we are coming, and will be there to-night. Dot—dash—dash—dot. What does he say? Oh, he evidently thinks it is some Boer ruse. Kekewich is a cautious sort of a man, and is not going to signal anything of consequence until he knows exactly who is going to receive the message. Send him something in code. And gradually the suspicions of the defenders of the Diamond City relax, and they make up their minds that French is, indeed, coming to their relief. "Enter the town on the east," is what they say; so French wheels his column and marches north, first detaching two squadrons to push straight ahead. Orders have they, these squadrons, to go into Kimberley if they can; but if they find themselves attacked by an overwhelming force, to retire on the main body. Away go the troopers, the envied of all their comrades; for it is accounted an honour to be first in at the relief of a besieged city.

Hark! that is the boom of the Boer 94-pounder. At this very moment, perhaps, women and children are dropping to its fire. On, my lads, on. Hungry are you and thirsty? Yes, we know all that; but we have promised "Bobs" to relieve Kimberley to-night. Advance patrols push out ahead of the main column; and these occasionally meet a few of the enemy's horsemen; whereupon there is firing of rifles and of carbines, and a little pushing with lances and a little hacking with sabres; but the main body marches on stolidly and steadily until it comes to a point due east of Kimberley. And then it left-wheels and changes direction from north to west and bears down upon the Boer lines in one solid mass.

The boom of cannon has ceased now, for the Dutchmen have taken alarm and are hurrying out of the way of our steel. There is a laager! A dash for it! Spear that man; he is a slayer of women and children. Cut down those half dozen

ruffianly-looking Germans, who are bolting for their lives. They have shelled the hospitals.

Kimberley is relieved at last.

At half-past six the first squadron of Carabiniers, headed by Rimington of the "Tigers," reach the barriers of the town. They had been preceded by the correspondent of the *Daily News* and another volunteer, who by hard riding had outdistanced the squadron by about a couple of minutes. Then at 7 o'clock, after a march of ten hours, French and his staff ride into the town.

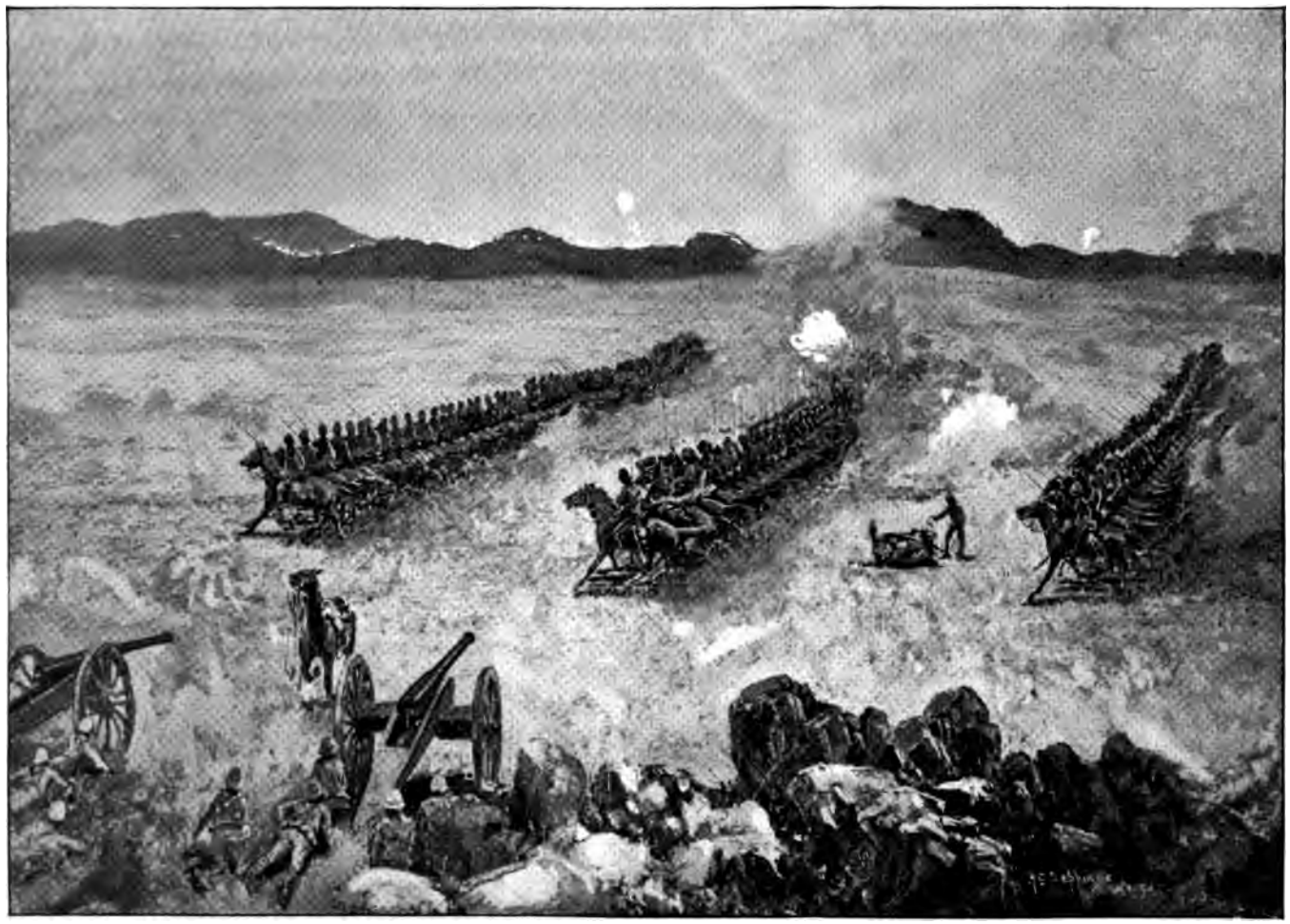
The main column had halted a couple of miles out, unable to move another yard. They had marched about twenty-five miles that day. They had charged for a distance of five miles at full gallop. They had crossed a country desert and waterless, blinded by dust-storms, their horses worn to very skeletons, themselves almost baked with the sun and reeling from the heat. Even now, as they flung themselves from the saddle, no food awaited them, except the contents of their haversacks; and even of this they were not allowed to consume more than that day's scanty ration. But they were light of heart and gay of spirit. They, the cavalry, they alone had outwitted, out-ridden, and out-fought the Dutchmen; and the women and children of Kimberley could come forth into the pure air of Heaven.

Right glad was the Diamond City when the news buzzed round the town and the outworks that relief had come. The 3,000 cave-dwelling women and children hurried from the floors of the mines to clear day once more. For a whole week their imprisonment had lasted, but now the Creusot gun had ceased from troubling, and it was safe to walk the streets again.

But many a delicate woman and many a tender child would never embrace husband or father again. Still, those dear ones who survived were out of danger now. They had kept the flag flying, and had defied an enemy more numerous and better armed than themselves. The mortality had been enormous—not so much amongst the fighting force as amongst the women and children who had perished from the foul and scanty feeding. At one time of the siege the infant mortality was nearly 50 per cent.; and the women of Kimberley and the mothers would remember to their dying day Monsieur Leon and his mighty engine of destruction.

But despite the sadness, the whole town turned out to welcome General French and his staff as they rode through the streets that night. The Silent Cavalryman was taciturn as usual. He saluted the cheering crowds who thronged round his horse, but nothing could induce him to make a speech. Cecil Rhodes produced from somewhere a few chickens and a tin of soup and some horse-flesh, and gave a dinner to French and his staff; and they drank "The Queen" in the last bottle of the great man's champagne.

It was two or three days before food could be sent up into the town; for French, as has been said, had brought no supplies with him. Wherefore the inhabitants of Kimberley still, for a day or two, continued their diet of husky meal and horse-flesh. But Lord Methuen managed at the end of three days to bring in waggons with food, and plain and rough as this was, it put new life into the gallant citizens of the Diamond City. The siege had lasted 123 days; and during the greater part of that time the garrison had endured the horrors of semi-starvation, and, for the latter part of it, the added terrors of bombardment. They had escaped



FRENCH'S CAVALRY GOING PAST A KOPJE.

assault; but the fighting force would have welcomed an attack from the burghers as a change from the grinding monotony of a sitting-down siege.

When the news reached London that Kimberley was at last relieved, the nation felt as though it had awakened from a bad dream. It was something new to hear of British men and women and children in a British colony being locked up and pounded, almost defenceless. And in recognition of the gallantry of the defence, her Majesty promoted Lieutenant-Colonel Kekewich to be a full colonel; while to show her appreciation of the dash and skill displayed in the relief, she made of Colonel French a major-general.

French had now performed brilliant services in three parts of the theatre of war. He it was who beat the Dutchmen at Elandslaagte—hitherto the only decisive victory of the campaign. He it was who, by the skilful disposition of his force and the unerring judgment of his moves, had out-manœuvred the Dutchmen in the north of Cape Colony and driven them out of thirty miles of railway. Now, having been selected to undertake an arduous and difficult operation, he had accomplished the march of ninety miles, at least half of it in the teeth of the enemy, in the most terrible country yet traversed by the British forces, with the loss of not more than fifty men killed and wounded. He had shown at Rensberg and Colesberg that he knew how to be prudent. On the 15th of February he showed that he knew the moment for a bold stroke; and the British cavalry is not likely to forget the time when the Silent General hurled a whole division charging at a defile.

As for Kekewich, that officer had acted with as much discretion as courage. One expects courage from a British officer—discretion is another matter. True, the Press men did not always approve of his manner of suppressing messages to the outer world. And he had been obliged to interfere with the liberty of the Press by prohibiting the further issue of a newspaper for commenting too strongly on his refusal to let news out of the town. But with a city of no great natural strength to be defended, with no such store of food or ammunition as there ought to have been, outclassed and outranged in the matter of ordnance, having within his camp many spies and traitors and more ill-wishers, it behoved the commander of the garrison to be scrupulously careful; and an error on the side of over-caution was an error on the right side.

He had succeeded. That was his justification.

As to the troops of the garrison, it was impossible to distinguish one corps from another whether for daring or for steadiness. The Loyal North Lancashires and the regiments of mounted infantry had borne the brunt of the fighting—the sorties and the skirmishes; but the Empire owed something also to those men of the Town Guard who, forsaking comfort and home, kept watch and ward in the ramparts of the Diamond City from the 16th of October, 1899, to the 15th of February, 1900.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE FLIGHT AND THE PURSUIT OF CRONJE.

FROM the day of Magersfontein to the 15th of February, Piet Cronje and his army had rested secure at Magersfontein and Spytfontein. They had heard from time to time of reinforcements arriving at the Cape. They had heard of Lord Roberts reaching the British camp at Modder River on the 9th of February; they had sent out a commando to meet Macdonald at Koodoosberg Drift on their right. But they had kept their left flank practically unprotected.

COMMANDANT ALBRECHT.

True it was that small bodies of burghers had been placed at Waterval Drift on the Riet, and Klip Drift on the Modder—the crossings that had been surprised and rushed by General French. But Cronje never imagined for a moment that his position was anything but the most secure.

Christian De Wet, the head commandant of the Free Staters with Cronje, had warned him of this. "You will have your left flank turned," De Wet had said; but Cronje, when he replied at all, had answered that it was an unnecessary fear. He, Piet Cronje, knew the British. They were brave, but foolish. They were depending for their supplies on the railway. The country on the left flank was waterless and desert. De Wet would see that the Englanders would leave the left flank alone and would do as they had done before—they would hurl their battalions at the fortifications of Magersfontein ridge or else march to the right and attack *viâ* Koodoosberg, in which case they would have to encounter the riflemen entrenched at Spytfontein.

Wherefore Cronje despised counsel and rested in his laager, waiting the onset of the *rooineks*.

And in this false security he remained until the morning of the 15th, when news was brought to him that an enormous body of horsemen, whom no man could number, was marching from Klip Drift straight on Kimberley. The old Boer leader acted with his customary promptitude. He ordered out two guns and 2,000 men to hasten across country and seize certain kopjes barring the road of the British. It was the advance guard of these whom French encountered on the 15th. As for the main body, they were too late. French's five miles' gallop had carried his whole division past the danger before the road could be completely blocked.

So the commandoes and the guns returned to Magersfontein and told how that the British had at last broken through, and other burghers came up from Klip

Drift telling that an enormous body of infantry with heavy guns had taken possession of the drift and now barred the road to Bloemfontein. Almost at the same moment fugitives from Jacobsdal reported another large force of British at that town.

Piet Cronje knew now that his left flank had been turned. He saw also that he was within an ace of being surrounded; the British were to the north, the south, and east of him, and he did not know whether there might not be another force round to the west, cutting him off there. In any case his position was desperate. Even should it happen that there were no British on the west, a march in that direction meant cutting himself completely off from his communications and his base, to regain which he must pass west and north of Kimberley, at the imminent risk of being cut up by the enormous force of horsemen reported to be there. He could, of course, stand and fight; but here he would be under the disadvantage of having to endure an attack from three sides at once, with the ultimate certainty of capture.

He resolved, therefore, on a bold and desperate stroke for liberty—to break through ere the net had been completely closed round him. Orders buzzed through the laagers. "Pack food and ammunition in the waggons; harness the teams; limber up the guns; every man mount and ride!"

The Boers were at their meal when these orders came. They had heard from the fugitives and scouts returning from all directions that the hated Englanders were closing round them; and they at once set to work to prepare to trek. Their preparations were made with the skill of accustomed hands and with the haste of fear. The tents were left standing. The half-eaten meal remained unfinished. Meat on the spits and bread in the ovens were left still cooking. Heavy guns were dismantled and mounted in waggons. Oxen and mules and pony teams were inspanned. There were women in the camp, and these mounted the waggons in haste and fear.

Daylight had ceased and darkness fallen when the stern commandant gave the order to trek to the eastward. He had made up his mind to cut in between the rear of the Cavalry Division and the head of the infantry, who were reported to be at Klip Drift. Then he would march straight to some drift higher up the Modder, cross to the south bank, and head for Bloemfontein. He calculated on being able to get to the other side of Klip Drift before daylight on the morning of the 16th, and he further expected to be able, if he were pursued, to hold the British in check by a series of rear-guard actions, which would enable his main body, with the guns and transport, to retreat on Bloemfontein with safety. Meantime he sent messages to the commandoes in the north of Cape Colony, at Colesberg and Stormberg, to come north again, or rather to detach some of their strength and to send it north to meet him on the road between Kimberley and Bloemfontein, so as to enable him to defend the Free State capital.

All that night Cronje marched east across the desert country traversed by French's Cavalry Division. An hour's rest at midnight and then the army trekked on, deflecting its course now a little to the south, so as to strike the Modder River at a drift known as Paardeberg Drift; whence there was some sort of road to the Free State capital. As many a daring move is apt to be, Cronje's bold effort was successful up to a certain point. He travelled all

night between Kimberley and Klip Drift unperceived.

Dawn broke. A sailorman of the Naval Brigade was on the look-out from a kopje north-east of the drift. He turned to a petty officer, "A cloud of dust—looks like a convoy." Word to headquarters; and hurry. There is a little flag-wagging, and up gallop my Lord Kitchener and General Kelly-Kenny. They, too, scan the cloud of dust. Yes; it is an army on the march, of that there can be no doubt. The keen eyes of the sailorman, his vigilance and promptness, had spoilt the daring plan of the Fighting General.

The "Egyptian Machine" hesitated not a moment. His orders had been to move with Kelly-Kenny's Division, so as to release French and his horsemen for their dash on Bloemfontein. But this was evidently Cronje's whole army, or a great part of it, in full retreat on the capital. What was more, they had made good their retreat so far as to give them some start.

A message to Lord Roberts with the tidings. Orders round the camp to every brigade commander, to every regimental commander, to arm and parade his men. We must swing clean round to the right and pursue; for although the enemy has got a few miles start, he is encumbered by transport, and it is just possible that by forced marches we may catch him up and fall upon his rear.

And most important of all, a message to French at Kimberley, telling him to collect every gun and every horse that can crawl, and hurry across the desert again to see if he can head off the foe. If he can, we have the whole lot of them in the hollow of our hand.

The Silent Cavalryman had not been wasting his time at Kimberley in useless festivities. No one knew better than he that there is a time for everything, and this particular time was the time for active exertion. At 3.30 a.m. on the 16th he had set out from Kimberley with his guns and all the horses that could raise a trot, to fall upon the Boers still left around the town. He had cut their lines to the north, forcing some of them north and some west. He had captured a 12-pounder gun, together with several laagers, some food, camp equipment, rifles, and ammunition. In fact, he had altogether broken to pieces the beleaguering force.

This he accomplished, not altogether without resistance; for the Dutchmen soon perceived that his cavalry was in no condition to pursue closely, and were able, in consequence, to indulge in some skirmishing at long range; but there was no fighting to speak of. Nothing in the nature of a battle. Still the work performed by the division was hard enough. The troops were out for about fifteen hours that day, and this, coming on top of their tremendous exertions of the previous four days, absolutely knocked them up. The men were fit enough, though they were thin and gaunt with hunger. Kimberley had no food to offer them, and they themselves had taken nothing more substantial than some food carried in their haversacks. The last of these rations they finished on Friday night.

It was, however, the horses who fared worst. Truth to tell, the British cavalryman, who had had no war training to speak of, did not know how to treat his mount in a climate and a country like this. For instance, when a halt was called, the troopers generally simply pulled up their horses and continued to sit in the saddle until a further order was given. That further order ought always to have been "Dismount." But it was not. So the

A DUST STORM IN CAMP.

horses would sometimes stand for hours together with the men in the saddles, when it would have been just as easy for the troopers, and much more beneficial to the horses, for the men to dismount and ease the saddle-girths a little. What one might call the legitimate hardships of cavalry work were quite sufficient to cause the breakdown of animals imported from temperate countries into South Africa. But it was the totally unnecessary hardship of keeping the poor beasts under heavy burdens, when such a course was not of the slightest use to anybody, that resulted in the fearful mortality amongst the horses, and almost—though fortunately not quite—caused Lord Roberts to fail and Cronje to escape.

On the night of the 16th the cavalry division bivouacked in the hope and the expectation of a long night's rest and a halt on the morrow. Their general had indeed given orders to the officers to allow the men to take it easy in the morning; but late that night after General French had retired to his well-earned rest, a messenger came with a telegram from Lord Kitchener. This is what it said: "Cronje is in full retreat from Magersfontein with all his waggons and equipment and four guns, along the north bank of the Modder River towards Bloemfontein. Have already fought rear-guard action with him. Take all available horses and guns and head him off. Infantry from Klip Drift will press on his rear, and we shall annihilate or capture the whole force."

The cavalry-general roused himself, and sent orders round to the brigade commanders to make ready early in the morn-

ing, parade their men and horses, and pick out all the animals that were fit for a long forced march. At the same time the artillery officers were to make up teams for as many batteries as they could, the whole to be ready at 3 a.m. the next day (17th).

When my Lord Kitchener saw the Boers in full retreat, as has been told, he did not delay a single moment, but resolved at once to throw himself upon their rear. There were (see page 573) at Klip Drift Hannay's and Ridley's mounted infantry, that had come up all the way from the Orange River since the 11th. When the chief of staff saw the cloud of dust on the plain, the mounted infantry was actually parading, ready to follow French into Kimberley, but Kitchener cancelled their orders and sent them straight away to pursue the foe.

Away went Hannay's men, cutting across the veldt in a northerly direction, trying to get to the north of the enemy, so as to fall upon his left flank, and at the same time the 13th Brigade, under General Knox, flew to arms and swung out to the east. Following the north bank of the river, the 13th Brigade marched as they had never marched before.

And Cronje soon perceived that he would have to fight his way out. So he sent his waggons on ahead to a place called Drieputs Farm, at a point where the Modder takes a bend to the north. The Boer transport beasts were tired and weary with their forced night march. It was hopeless for them to attempt to get up any speed until they had rested; wherefore they laagered up at Drieputs Farm, what time about half Cronje's men, to the number of 2,000, took up positions on the hills, prepared to fight a rear-guard action, so as to give their transport time to get away.

The theory of a rear-guard action is that it is a purely defensive operation conducted by a smaller body of troops with intent to delay the enemy's main body, so as to give time for one's own main body to perform some operation. It is, in fact, a fight for time, and the most successful rear-guard action is the action which delays the enemy longest with the least fighting. Rear-guard actions are fought under two sets of circumstances in the main. First, when an army has been defeated or outmanœuvred and is retreating, then time is necessary to enable the scattered fragments to collect again and to receive reinforcements. Again, rear-guard actions are fought when an enemy is invading a country. In such circumstances the defenders never know where the invaders will strike, and are consequently obliged to scatter their forces considerably along the frontier. When the invading army makes its appearance, it is necessary for some body of the defenders to delay it for a time until the whole of the army of defence can be collected together to fight the invaders on equal terms.

It will naturally be asked why a small body should be able to detain a large body, so as to be able to gain any appreciable amount of time. And the answer is this. A pursuing, or invading, army, as the case may be, is bound to be marching in column—that is, with its component bodies one behind the other on the road; and it cannot fight until it has deployed—that is, until it has spread itself out in line formation, so as to afford room for manœuvring. Thus, in the case before us, the 13th Brigade would march with its four regiments one behind the other. They could not fight in this formation, because it would afford a dense target for the enemy, while the British firing

line would only be a very small one. So that if they found themselves suddenly opposed by a force which appeared to be considerable, and to be well posted in natural defensive positions, the brigade must necessarily halt and deploy for battle.

As soon as it has deployed—which takes a time long in proportion to the size of the force—the enemy keep up a show of fighting until the pursuers come within effective striking distance. Then they promptly retreat to another defensive position, a mile or two in the rear. The pursuing brigade forms up again in column for the march, and when it arrives at the next point has to deploy again.

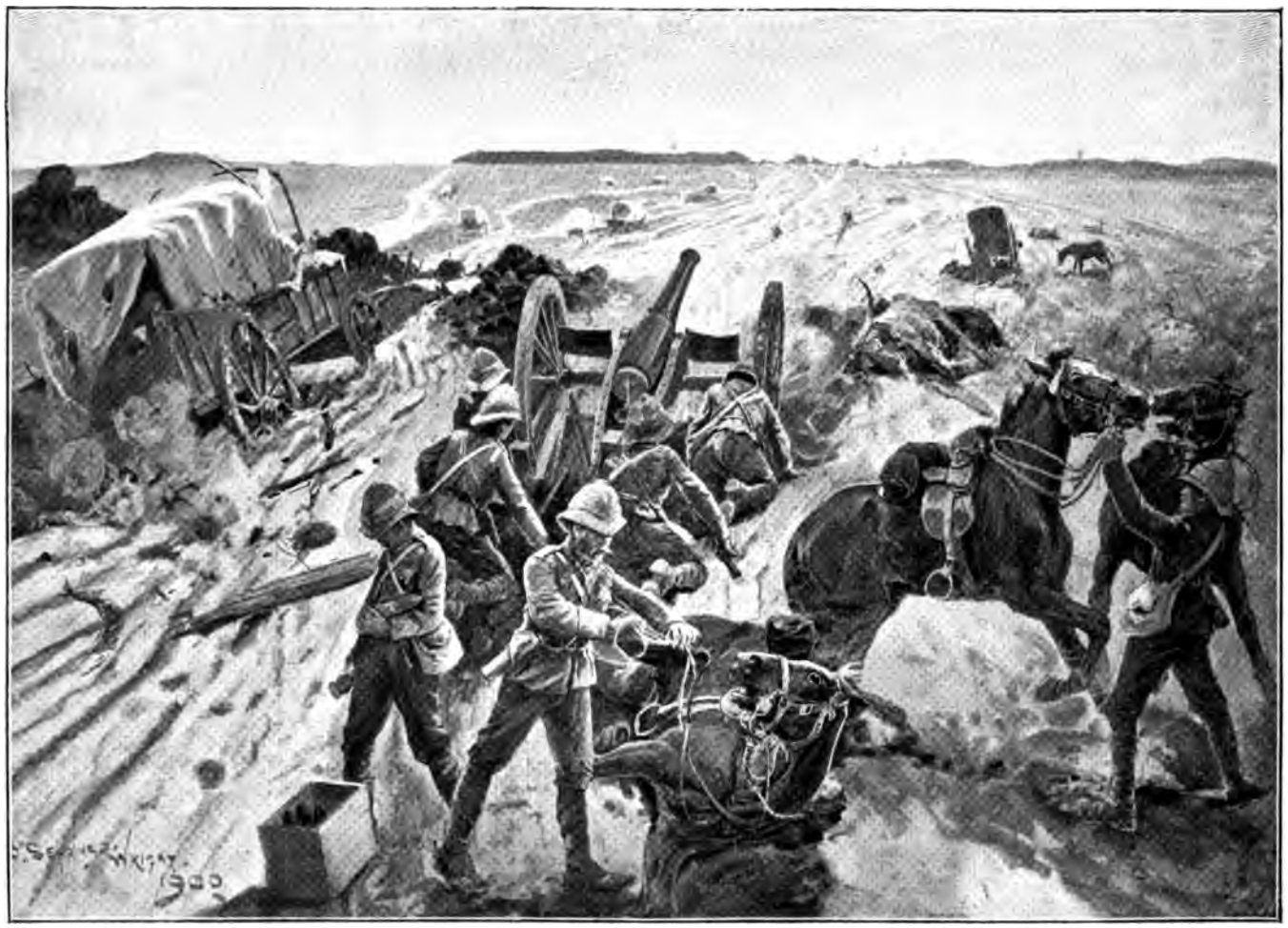
This system of rear-guard actions is as old as the hills, and is a most effective way of compelling an enemy to waste time. Thus, when Wellington and Blucher were spread over a wide extent of country in Belgium, awaiting the coming of Napoleon's last army, they knew he might come by one of four or five roads. So they posted rear-guards on each of these avenues at the banks of rivers. The result was that when the French army came along in three immense columns its progress was delayed for several days until such time as the English and the Prussian commanders could collect their scattered forces into armies; 8,000 Prussians delayed one of the French columns of 65,000 men to such an extent that the Frenchmen, in a level country like Belgium, only covered five miles in twenty-four hours. And this was done not so much by fighting as by continually pretending to make a stand, thus obliging the French general to deploy his force for battle.

In the case before us, the Boers fought their rear-guard actions with the utmost skill. Hannay's mounted infantry harassed them on the flank, and the 13th Brigade hurried at them to chivvy them out of their positions. The Boers kept up a rifle-fire from 2,800 down to 1,500 yards. Then, leaving one or two marksmen scattered over the kopje that was being attacked, the rest rode round to the back of another kopje or ridge, and prepared to do exactly the same thing there.

Had the 13th Brigade and the mounted infantry been the only troops in pursuit, there is little doubt that the fighting Dutch general would have got away with the whole of his guns and transport, and with comparatively little loss.

Knox had with him the Oxford Light Infantry, the Gloucesters, the West Ridings, and the Buffs, with one battery of field artillery; and these, with the mounted infantry harassing the enemy on his flank, finally drove the rear-guard from their first position on a plateau to the laager at Drieputs Farm. This plateau was of great extent, and had rising from it a whole line of kopjes extending from the river to a point about 1,000 yards west-north-west. The Oxfords, the West Ridings, and the Gloucesters, now as keen as bloodhounds on the trail, were sent to attack the line of hills; while the Buffs marched to the river, as though to cross it and attack from the other bank. The movement last-mentioned was only a feint, but it had the effect of causing the enemy to direct a considerable number of men to the kopjes nearest to the river, and even to send some down into the river bed, thus leaving the rest of his position somewhat more thinly defended.

The 81st Field Battery trotted up towards the largest kopje, which was on the south, unlimbered, and poured a heavy fire upon that part of the position—a fire concentrated with intent to destroy the



ON THE HEELS OF CRONJE.

enemy's resistance in this particular place. The Oxford Regiment was in front of this battery, advancing under cover of ant-heaps to the attack of the kopje, and keeping up a persistent individual fire as the men crawled from point to point. The West Riding Regiment and the Gloucesters took charge of two other kopjes, advancing in the same way as the Oxfords, by slow crawling and creeping, spread out wide in a sort of extended skirmishing order, exposing themselves as little as possible to the marksmen on the hill tops.

Behind the 81st Field Battery Lord Kitchener sat upon his horse directing the operations, and when he saw the Oxfords, West Ridings, and the Gloucesters closely engaged, he sent an order to the Buffs to cross over from right to left and make a feint round on the other wing of the enemy. The Buffs marched at great speed from our extreme right to our extreme left, and circled round the plateau as though to cut off the Boer rear-guard from the convoy. This decided the battle. Seeing themselves on the point of being surrounded, the Dutchmen gave back, slowly at first, then faster and faster, as the 81st Battery followed them up and the mounted infantry and the 13th Brigade pressed closer on their heels.

But let it be said that Cronje and his lieutenants conducted the battle with a skill that might serve as a model to any European general. The burghers on the right and left rode round their own centre to the rear, leaving the centre to keep up a show of fighting until the two wings had formed in order of battle behind them. Then the centre retreated much faster than the infantry could have done, because they had their horses in sheltered spots at the base of the kopjes; and when the order came for them to retire, the men just simply emptied their magazines for the last time, then ran down hill, mounted, and rode back, forming on the right and left of the new centre.

The position was an excellent one for an action of this kind, for it consisted of a clump of hills tumbled together, as though some giant had picked up twenty or thirty of them and thrown them down higgledy-piggledy.

As soon as the firing grew slack upon the first position, the 13th Brigade rushed up and captured it, only to find the enemy in another post just in front, every whit as strong as the other. But Lord Kitchener was not to be denied. He brought up his battery and shelled the new post, and again threw his mounted infantry out on his left flank and sent the 13th Brigade to attack in the front. And so the battle raged all day; nor did the hungry British infantry ever come to close quarters with the enemy. After driving the rear-guard about five miles, the mounted infantry saw laagered up a large number of the enemy's waggons. Kitchener saw them too, and resolved to have a little of his own back. So he hurled the whole 13th Brigade slap at the enemy with bayonets fixed.

Half the brigade was moved across the river and hurried along the other bank to enfilade the enemy on that side, and now the British infantry began to have some satisfaction. Finding himself hard-pressed, Cronje withdrew across two miles of open ground to a position farther in the rear. All the way he found himself exposed to the fire of 1,200 rifles; and at last, to save his men, he was obliged to leave behind seventy-eight waggons. But he reached the position he aimed at in safety; and once there, gave our infantry back as good as they sent.

Until nightfall the fighting continued. Cronje, by his skilful rear-guard actions, had saved the bulk of his convoy and his main army; but the 13th Brigade, by so persistently hanging on his rear, had prevented him from making very quick progress. This was Lord Kitchener's game. His message to French ought to result in a quick dash of cavalry across country, so as to strike at the Modder somewhere ahead of the retreating Boers. So long as the 13th Brigade and a field battery could hang on the rear, Cronje dare not attempt to cross the river, and so long as he was on the north bank he was cut off from his base at Bloemfontein.

From 11 a.m. until nightfall a continuous crackle of musketry and boom of cannon was heard on veldt and kopje, nor was it until darkness closed that the fighting slackened.

Now let us turn to the other movements of the British army on the 16th of February. As soon as Lord Roberts heard of Cronje's flight eastward, he promptly ordered the whole army to swing round to the right and follow—all except the brigade of Guards, who were left with Lord Methuen and told to occupy the Magersfontein position. This swinging of the army round to the right was a great stroke of genius.

Many a general would have remained for further supplies after he had lost, as Lord Roberts had lost, almost the whole of the food and forage of the army. To set out, as he was about to set out, would mean that he could get no further supplies until he could strike a railway: because not only had he lost his food, but also the means of transporting it across open country. And the nearest railway was at Bloemfontein.

But Roberts of Kandahar knew well that he had only to call upon the army to suffer, and it would suffer cheerfully. He sent for the quartermaster-general. "Can you give me half rations for a month?" The director of supplies replied that the thing was impossible. He could not give a third, he said. By straining every nerve he might possibly provide quarter rations for the troops. Lord Roberts mused awhile. Then, said he, "I think they will do it for me."

Do it for him—of course they would! And they would be proud and glad—just as proud and glad to starve for "Bobs" as to fight for him. And so began the historic march to Bloemfontein, undertaken advisedly with only a quarter of the necessary food supply.

It was the 17th of February before the army really started on the track of Cronje. French was the first to move, but Hector Macdonald and the Highland Brigade were not long after. The Highlanders were at Jacobsdal with the 9th Division under General Colvile; and when they heard that Cronje was running away, they clamoured to be allowed to go after him. "Fighting Mac" was nothing loth to lead them; and Roberts of Kandahar, who owed so much to the Highland troops, was willing enough to give the Scotsmen a chance to retrieve their laurels.

So the four battalions of Highlanders, the same who had been so heavily punished by Cronje at Magersfontein, faced east from Jacobsdal and marched on the track of their enemy. Grimly they stepped along, caring nothing for the heat and rigours of the way, caring only for the chance of coming to grips with the hated Dutchmen.

The 6th Division was now at Klip Kraal Drift, on the scene of the rear-guard action, a place about twenty-four miles

from Jacobsdal. "We must catch them up by night, men," said Fighting Mac, and the men cheered him as he said it. He was a soldier after their own heart, who never hesitated to call upon them for any exertion, however arduous, provided there was a chance of a fight at the end of it. So the Highland Brigade stepped out across the sand, and that night arrived at Kelly-Kenny's camp, having marched twenty-four miles during the day—from which one sees that their losses did not demoralise the men of North Britain.

As for General French, his operations were even more brilliant than those of the Highlanders. His force was in a condition totally unfit for rapid motion ; but on the morning of the 17th he collected every horse that could bear a rider, and formed one brigade out of them. This brigade he placed under the command of Broadwood, and it amounted, including Australian troops, to 1,200 sabres.

As for artillery, only three batteries could be mustered, from lack of draught animals ; but these were sent out along with Broadwood, and the whole force was on its way south at 3.30 a.m. French, with his staff, followed an hour later. For fifteen miles the pace was of the kind known to hunting and racing men as "a cracker," for the cavalry general meant to make the most of the cool hours of the morning. This distance having been covered, they called a halt ; and then the tired troopers mounted the still more tired horses and pushed on over the sandy, dreary waste.

At 11 a.m. the familiar green belt proclaimed that the Modder was not far ahead. And French cautiously pushed round a little to the left, so as to take his men behind the shelter of a clump of round kopjes which commanded the river. He himself rode ahead, as his custom was, to reconnoitre, and when he reached the summit of one of the hills he saw ahead of him a long train of waggons drawn by oxen and mules and ponies, and accompanied by nearly 5,000 men.

They were heading for the river, and French strained his eyes to see if he could discern behind them any body of British troops pursuing. But he could not. The wily Cronje had set out from Klip Kraal at midnight, escaping the too vigilant attentions of Kelly-Kenny and Kitchener, and had reached a drift which would allow him a comfortable passage across the Modder and to Bloemfontein.

Even now the train of waggons is heading for the drift, and the leading team is not more than half a mile from the ford. French turns his horse's head and gallops back to the spot where he has left his troopers watering their horses. Batteries to the front ! No trotting or galloping—you will just have time to get into position if you go at a walk, and will raise no dust to attract the attention of those keen-eyed men of the veldt.

It did not take many minutes for the three Horse Batteries to put themselves in motion, and at ten minutes after the stroke of noon they were just behind the top of a hill commanding Paardeberg Drift. The range was easy. "Unlimber ! Load ! See, there is a waggon just dipping into the drift. Now you Horse Gunners, just pepper the head of that column. Smash it to pieces. Not a single waggon nor a solitary gun must cross that river." Boom ! And the first of French's guns lands a shell about a yard in front of Cronje's leading waggon. The next one, following about two seconds after, is even better aimed. It bursts right in the waggon and blows it to pieces. The drift is blocked

"THE HUSSARS SEND MORE VOLLEYS AFTER THEM" (p. 606).

now, and the fate of Cronje's convoy is irrevocably sealed.

Wellington is reported to have prayed for night or Blucher. One imagines that the Silent Cavalryman prayed, on this occasion, for the sight of the dust of Kelly Kenny's column. For even now, though the convoy was a certain capture, there was nothing to prevent Cronje and his men from crossing the river and reaching Bloemfontein in comparative safety. But the grim Boer general had no idea of abandoning his waggons and his guns. He had sent messages to the commandoes in Cape Colony to come to his assistance, and he made up his mind to await their arrival rather than retreat with the loss of all his stores. So he turned at bay fiercely.

His first move, and it was the move of a born general, was to detach a troop of his men to seize a kopje between himself and French, a kopje that might be held by a rear-guard, so as to afford cover for the main body to cross. But General French also had his eye on that kopje. A quick order, and two squadrons of Hussars dug in the spur and galloped for the hill. It was a race with a mighty stake. If the Boers could seize the kopje and plant a gun there they might hold the position for a long time, and possibly escape by sacrificing one gun and a small rear-guard.

But although the horses of the Hussars were weary, the ponies of the Boers were almost as tired. And the British cavalrymen were better than their rivals when it came to such a matter as a race. A horse tumbles over, stone dead. He has burst a blood vessel. Another catches its foot in a hole, and its rider pitches out of the saddle. But the squadrons race on with a reckless disregard of the nature of the country.

On the other side the Boers race also: and French and his staff stand upon another kopje, where they can see both sides of the contest. Hurrah! Our men have won. See, they dismount and load their carbines. The Boers urge their ponies up the last few yards of the hill, only to be met by a volley almost in their faces. Shaggy ponies roll over and over, tattered men drop on the hill-side, but those whole and unhurt turn and flee. The Hussars send more volleys after them; but one is fain to confess that the shooting is of the worst. To begin with, a race is not the very best preparation for musketry, which demands above all a steady hand.

All day long French's three batteries shelled the Boer waggons, and that with deadly effect. Here a shell would drop into a waggon laden with ammunition; there into a waggon loaded with food; and as waggon after waggon was set on fire, explosions shook the air and flame after flame burst forth. Any commander less grim and brave than Cronje would have done one of two things—he would either have surrendered, or, abandoning transport and artillery, have fled with all his force.

But the Dutchman, to his credit be it said, seems never to have thought of doing either one or the other. He would resist to the uttermost. He would, if necessary, die fighting. And he would make the Englishman pay life for life. So he sank into the bed of the river, and soon more than half his force was occupied in digging trenches and bomb-proof shelters.

The Modder at this point, and, indeed, for the greater part of its length, has a bed of enormous depth. The banks on both sides are about thirty feet high; and in this bed trickles at ordinary times a stream that can easily be waded. But when a

storm comes (one of the rain-storms that diversify the terrible heat and dust of South Africa), the trickling stream becomes a rushing torrent, and so fast and so furiously do the waters run that the swirl of them hollows out deep holes in the banks. These holes, somewhat deepened by spade labour. formed admirable bomb-proof shelters, and others were constructed deep enough to hold a man stooping—narrow at the top, so as to afford the least possible opening for a shell ; wider at the bottom, so as to give room for movement.

The 18th Brigade of the 6th Division recrossed the river at Klip Drift on the morning of the 17th at three o'clock. The brigade was three regiments strong—the Essex, Welsh, and Yorkshire Regiments. The Warwicks, who made up the brigade, had been left behind. The orders of the 18th Brigade were to march along on the south bank of the river and try to head off Cronje's force at Paardeberg or Koodoos-rand Drift. The other brigade of Kelly-Kenny's Division remained on the northern bank with the mounted infantry.

The mounted infantry — and here was seen the value of riflemen on horseback—pushed on ahead of the rest of the force, crossed the river higher up, and the same evening got in touch with the enemy, and encamped on rising ground close to Paardeberg Drift, on the south bank of the stream. This was about 6 p.m. The infantry rested during the heat of the day, and at about 6 p.m. resumed their march and set out for Paardeberg Drift in the darkness. They missed their way, and so passed the drift. But the mistake was lucky rather than otherwise, because Cronje had determined not to attempt to cross here in face of French, but to attempt a passage a little higher up. And the infantry that had missed its way stumbled right on some kopjes commanding the identical drift which Cronje had intended to use. So much for the movements of the 6th Division.

We have already stated how Macdonald with the Highland Brigade of the 9th Division set out on a forced march from Jacobsdal in pursuit of the Highlanders' particular foe. The other (19th) brigade of the 9th Division started soon afterwards and followed on the heels of Macdonald, to have their share of the fighting, if fighting there should be. The 19th Brigade consisted of four splendid regiments —the 1st Gordons, the Royal Canadians, the Shropshires, and the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry. The Canadians held their heads high, chiefly for the reason that they were brigaded with the 1st Gordons, the men of Dargai, reputed to be the finest battalion of infantry in the British army, if not in the world. As for the Canadians, many of them bore Scottish names ; but there was one whole company, under Major Pelletier, consisting entirely of French-descended men, who were second to none, and were determined to distinguish themselves. How they did it shall be told hereafter.

To be brief. By the night of the 17th, or early morning of the 18th, Cronje found himself in the presence of an overwhelming British force, which had marched upon him from Klip Drift, from Jacobsdal, and from Kimberley ; for the 6th and 9th Infantry Divisions, with French's Cavalry Brigade and the mounted infantry under Colonels Hannay and Ridley, had all caught him up and were disposed on all sides of him.

Now Roberts of Kandahar had ordered straitly that the men of his army should not be wasted in frontal attacks on entrenched positions.

CHAPTER L.

OPERATIONS IN THE NORTH OF CAPE COLONY—A CHAPTER ABOUT COLONIALS.

ONE of the early measures of Lord Roberts was, as we have already said, to raise in Cape Colony a considerable number of mounted riflemen. There had been Colonial troops raised before the advent of "Bobs," but the British commanders, with a deficiency of judgment that can only be considered marvellous, had employed them chiefly in guarding lines of communications and such other necessary but not very active duties. Lord Roberts formed a considerable number of these troops into a brigade, and as commander thereof selected Colonel Brabant, to whom he gave the rank of brigadier-general. It was publicly stated that Brabant's division would be sent to the front, and immediately recruits poured in. There were two regiments formed, called Brabant's Horse, about 1,500 strong, and almost every town and district began to contribute its quota of mounted marksmen to serve under the Colonial general. It will be well to mention these troops, for they did yeoman service in the campaign, and earned the admiration and applause of the Army and the Empire.

First and foremost there was Brabant's Horse; then about 150 men of the Frontier Mounted Rifles; about 200 of the Queenstown Mounted Rifles; 550 Kaffrarian Mounted Rifles; and, last of all, a grand set of men called the Cape Mounted Rifles, under Colonel Dalgety, about 500 strong. Altogether there were some 2,900 men of the right stamp—men who could tackle the Transvaalers at their own game; acclimatised, which was a great thing; knowing the country, also a great thing; and mobile, which was even better than all the others.

Brabant, for about a month or so, occupied himself in drilling his men. He himself had had much experience of frontier fighting, and he knew the necessity of teaching his troops discipline and order. So he put them through a course of training, when he tried to concentrate into about a month's work that which ordinarily takes two years. One of his troopers was heard to observe—"I never knew I was so strong. Out of the last seven days I have had about seven hours' sleep and an average of fourteen hours' drill. I am perfectly certain no Boer can kill me after this—if I was meant to die I'd have died three weeks ago."

On the 10th of February, Brabant and his staff arrived at Penhoek, which was south of Sterkstroom, and his division followed a day or two after. Some of the corps composing it had been with General Gatacre for some little time, and had already smelt powder and proved that they were worth their pay and their rations.

It will assist the reader to understand the true inwardness of the next few moves in north Cape Colony if we explain exactly the plan that Lord Roberts had in his mind when he started to move his divisions on the road to Kimberley.

It was of the utmost importance—indeed, it was essential to the welfare of the forces—that the British army should have a line of communication with its base, the seaboard, by rail. Now Lord Roberts intended, having boxed up Cronje at the Modder, to make a dash for Bloemfontein. This would put him on a railway

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communicating with Cape Colony and its various ports. He would be on the line to East London *viâ* Springfontein, Bethulie, and Stormberg ; on the line to Port Alfred and Port Elizabeth *viâ* Springfontein, Colesberg, and Naauwpoort. He could also easily communicate with Cape Town *viâ* the railway running to De Aar, whence a branch line to Naauwpoort connects the Cape Town–Kimberley line with the Port Elizabeth–Bloemfontein line.

At Bloemfontein, also, he would be on the direct railway line to Pretoria, and though he would be unable to transport troops by it, yet the railway would give him the necessary facilities for the carriage of food and ammunition to the front, and the sending back of sick and wounded to the base hospitals.

But between Bloemfontein and the British ports mentioned, the Boers were in force. There was a commando at Colesberg blocking the line to Port Elizabeth and Naauwpoort ; and there was another commando at Stormberg, blocking the line to East London. Should these commandoes retreat, destroying the line behind them to any great extent, the British force would be in a very bad way until repairs had been completed. Wherefore Lord Roberts, with deep-laid strategy, did not attempt to drive before him the commandoes at Colesberg and Stormberg ; and, indeed, he instructed the generals in

command of the forces opposite those commandoes to do nothing more than keep the burghers well employed. For, you see, so long as a commando was at Colesberg, the line between Colesberg and Bloemfontein would be safe, and so long as a Boer force was at Stormberg, the line to the north of Stormberg would be safe, because the Boers themselves needed the railways for their own transport and their own retreat.

If the British could strike at the back of these two forces, compelling them to retreat for fear of being altogether surrounded and cut off, the two British armies to the south could follow up the burghers and harass them so as to prevent them from doing much damage to the railway line.

The scheme succeeded to admiration. Quietly, and at night, Lord Roberts withdrew from round about Colesberg the greater part of French's division, leaving, in the first week in February, only a skeleton army. The Boers had no idea of this. They saw camps standing. Troops were perpetually on the move, as though seeking an opening for an attack; and the Dutchmen had not the slightest notion that the force in front of them only numbered tens now where hundreds had stood last week.

When General French left Rensburg at the end of January, Major-General Clements was left in command; and the British public, knowing nothing at all about the schemes of my Lord Roberts, heard with dismay that at Colesberg and Rensburg, where French had been hitherto so extremely successful, the British were being driven back and still further back.

In the early days of February the skirmishing went on round about Rensburg; and of all the troops in the camp, none distinguished themselves more than the various Australian contingents. On the 9th of February, about fifty of them set out on a reconnaissance, and reached a farmhouse belonging to one Coetze. Riding across a field to examine some kopjes, the Australians were saluted by a crackling of Mausers and an unpleasantly close shower of bullets. Captain Cameron, who was in command of the party, rode his men towards a high, rocky kopje, dismounted them, and prepared to hold the position. The Boers dismounted also, and, being in considerable force, worked round to the rear of the Australians.

But they did not accomplish their flanking movement without paying for it. The Australians could shoot more than a little, and they took cover behind rocks and shot at every head they could see. There was one Tasmanian, named Peers, who was particularly successful. He shot two Boers in five minutes. Then he became careless, through elation, and exposed himself recklessly from behind his rock, with the result that a bullet grazed his neck. This did not hurt him much, but only made him swear; and he, being under cover, watched the stone from behind which the Mauser peeped when he was struck. Soon a head appeared round the stone, and the wily Tasmanian did not show at once. The Boer thought he had killed his man, and proceeded to crawl to another stone whence he could command another rooinek. But he reckoned without his Tasmanian. Peers let him get right into the open, and then, with steady aim, shot him straight through the ear.

Other Australians were similarly successful; and, indeed, the Dutchmen now had some experience of what it was like to attack a kopje held by expert riflemen

who declined to show themselves to be shot at. Dutchman after Dutchman bit the dust; but more rode up, and it became evident to Captain Cameron that he would soon be surrounded by such an overwhelming force that he must be captured with all his men. So he passed word round for every man to get ready for a rush. The word was given, and, with one motion, the whole fifty rose from their cover and bolted to the kloof where they had left their horses. Into the saddle and away. There is still a place at the foot of the hill where the Boers are not very thick. Dash through them in single file, and do not stop to parley.

The suddenness of it constitutes the safety of the force; for though they ride in full view and within easy range of the Dutch riflemen, not a single man is touched. Two or three horses drop, and two or three other horses have to bear a double burden. But the Australians ride, not in the stiff, upright fashion of British cavalry; they ride as men should ride who are being pelted all the way—heads bent well over, and bodies low down, so that nothing stands up conspicuously from the horse. Thus they retreat to another line of kopjes, and there dismount. Another skirmish, much the same as the last. Another dash back towards the camp under fire, and the Australians reach the camp that night without any losses, except one man wounded and a few horses left on the veldt.

On the same day (February 9th) the enemy began a flanking movement and outflanked that part of our force which occupied Bastard's Nek. And another reconnaissance of Inniskilling Dragoons and twenty Australians had a skirmish particularly warm. The Australians were out scouting by themselves, about six miles from the Slingersfontein camp, and were investigating a kopje supposed to contain the enemy, when they found themselves surrounded by an overwhelming force. One party of Boers was within 200 yards of the Colonials before being discovered.

"Surrender!" the Boer leader cried. "Surrender! you are at our mercy."

"Come and take us if you can." "Fix bayonets!" "Come and try a hand-to-hand tussle." "You're welcome to all you can catch." These and other shouts of defiance were the only answers made by the Australians.

Captain Moor, who commanded the little troop, had not the slightest notion of laying down his arms, or of surrendering his force. If he had, it is permissible to doubt whether his force would have taken the slightest notice of him. They had come all the way from Australia to fight, and the more fighting there was, the better they liked it.

"I think," said Moor, "that we can hold this hill against any number they can bring against us; but we must send word to the camp where we are."

A sergeant and two troopers volunteered to run the gauntlet, and they did it in a fashion that would have been quite impossible for men less dashing and horsemen less skilled. They galloped some four miles under a hot fire the whole way; but by dint of swerving and slightly altering pace, and lying the whole time with head sheltered behind the horse's neck, they broke through; and told the commanding officer that their seventeen comrades were hemmed in at present, but were holding their own.

The same seventeen were, indeed, in a hot corner. They had to contend with men who were seldom deceived as to the number of rifles opposed to them; and as

A TURN WITH THE GLOVES AT STERKSTROOM.

soon as the Dutchmen discovered that they had less than twenty to deal with, they pushed up the sides of the kopje with more than usual dash and persistence. One of them crawled up so near that he was within nine yards of our Colonials before being discovered. Then, "By G——, that's a Boer," an Australian ejaculated, as one should say, "that's a rabbit"; and incidentally a Lee-Metford went off, and the Boer dropped in his tracks. The Australian had fired without putting his rifle to his shoulder.

The Dutchmen found the Australian bushman a very different kind of fellow from the guileless Tommy Atkins. The British soldier, nine times out of ten, if he wanted to see where the enemy was, would pop his head out of cover, trusting merely to luck to be able to get back unhurt. The Australian, on the other hand, did not put his head out of cover unless he was able to place it against a background of such a kind that he would be not easily visible. The Boers found to their cost, too, that this particular brand of *rooinek* could shoot with exasperating precision. Not a Dutchman could show a finger or the tip of an elbow without a most unpleasant reminder of the straight shooting of the Australians. In fact, after about two hours, during which only one Australian was killed—and he while out in the open binding up a comrade's wound — and three were wounded, the Dutchmen ceased from troubling. They had made up their minds to wait until it was dark, and then to rush the kopje. But the Australians had also made up their minds to do something when it was dark—namely, to get back to camp, which they proceeded to do without noise or fuss, so that when the Boers, at about an hour after midnight, made a rush, they found the cupboard bare.

So reconnaissance and skirmish followed skirmish and reconnaissance. One day the Boers drove in a picket; and the next day a few Australians, with, perhaps, a little assistance from some Inniskilling Dragoons, would return and chase them out. There was another curious incident of a trooper named Bosch, of French's Guides, who was riding out towards Slingersfontein when he met a Dutchman.

Each thought the other to be a friend, nor was the mistake discovered until they were within five yards of each other. Then each grabbed his rifle. Bosch happened to be the handier of the two, and he got the "drop" on the other man and took him prisoner.

"You ride along with me," said the trooper, "and do not try any tricks, or I shall be obliged to blow your head off." The Boer rode quite resignedly with his captor, and presently they saw seven other Boers, who had no idea that the two men in front of them were captured and capturer. So the seven rode quite comfortably forward, until Bosch admonished them with a shot from his rifle. The seven rode closer, and unslung their rifles; but on the moment there appeared in sight two others of French's Guides, who joined in the fray with such effect that the farmers were glad enough to get away. All except one. Him Bosch captured, having first disabled his horse by a lucky shot; and so the trooper rode into Slingersfontein with two captives in front of him.

On the 12th of February, at a very early hour in the morning, the Boers made an attack on the Slingersfontein position; and as the British force had been so very considerably depleted by almost the whole of the cavalry, General Clements was obliged to fall back to prevent himself being outflanked.

On the 14th the Boers again pressed forward, and again Clements was obliged to retire before their overwhelming numbers. The British losses during these retirements were comparatively slight, the only casualties of any moment being the capture of two companies of the Wiltshire Regiment, who were on outpost duty and were entirely forgotten when Slingersfontein was evacuated.

The Australians again distinguished themselves—this time in covering the retirement of outlying bodies of infantry; and on one occasion they even charged the Boers on horseback, though, being without swords or lances, naturally without very deadly effect.

The Worcestershire Regiment had some fighting on the 12th. They lost their colonel, their major, and about 28 killed and 100 wounded and missing. They defended against enormous odds, and without artillery, a kopje near Slingersfontein farm, and inflicted on the enemy considerable loss. Then a troop of Inniskillings got cut off, and found that they must either surrender or cut their way through. They decided not to surrender.

Trot! Gallop! Charge! And for practically the first time in the war a troop of horse charged in line a body of the enemy in open country. There were about 500 of the Dutchmen who faced the little troop, and these fired so wildly and emptied their magazines with such haste that it was obvious they were panic-stricken at the sight of men with the pointed sticks bearing down on them at top speed. Indeed, so wild was the firing that not a man of the Dragoons was hurt nor a horse touched.

Level lances! And, with one tremendous shout, a double line of heavy cavalry crashed into the commando. Then arose yells for mercy, shrieks of agony, and groans of the dying, as, like a scythe cutting through the sweet meadow grass, the Dragoons clove through the panic-stricken commando. A swathe of dead and wounded marked their path. Those whom the lances of the front line spared, the swords of the rear rank cut down. And when the Inniskillings emerged on the other side of the astonished Dutchmen,

the latter were so absolutely shaken that they had not the presence of mind to turn round and fire upon the flying troop.

But of all deeds done in those days, when every kopje from Colesberg to Arundel was watered red, the most glorious and the most memorable was the deed of twenty Victorian mounted riflemen, who showed that Britons under the Southern Cross had not forgotten how to die. These twenty men saw some Boers on a kopje, and immediately rode to hustle them out, as they had hustled parties out many a time before. But this time the wily Dutchmen had laid a trap for them; and when the Victorians reached the summit of the kopje they found themselves surrounded at close quarters by an enemy outnumbering them twenty to one. The Boer commandant advanced and demanded a surrender. "Surrender be damned!" was the unanimous and sole reply.

"But," said the Boer, "you will all certainly be killed."

"Then killed we will be. A man can only die once."

"We must sell our lives dearly. Charge!" And, with a cheer that proclaimed unmistakably their lineage, the twenty heroes flung themselves on the foe. The Dutchmen gave back a moment—they wanted space to raise their rifles and shoot. Into them with fury dashed the Australians. The bayonets have changed their colour now. Crack! and the rifles speak out, and three men go down—the range is so short that an infant in arms could not miss. For ten minutes the Victorians stab and thrust and smite and slay. There are only five of them now, and two of these are wounded.

"Surrender!" Again a Boer steps forward with an offer of life. Again the answer comes, "We can only die once." Once more the word rings out—"Charge!"—and the five run upon the foe. There are five Boers the less in the world; and as the bayonets are withdrawn, and the heroic five dash forward again, seeking some further part of the price they intend to exact, four drop with holes drilled through the brain. The last man, with strength of despair and the ferocity of vengeance, rushes single-handed on the whole phalanx. Stab—right through the throat the steel goes. "Hurrah!" The blood of the ancient sea-pirates shows again in this their far-off descendant. He goes mad with the delirium of slaughter. He sees red. He shouts in maddest joy as he thrusts the iron through bone and muscle and sinew. The Boers grow afraid of him. He is uncanny; and almost he breaks through the overwhelming host. At last, one of the Dutchmen recovers his nerve, claps a Mauser pistol to the head of the last Victorian, and his soul has gone to join those other passing spirits. And twenty bodies lie upon the kopje. Twenty hands grasp still the stocks of rifles, whereon are fixed the weapons they have wielded so well. And on every bayonet of the twenty there is blood. And the Boers go round and look upon these men as they lie, and shake their heads, and say "Almighty! what extraordinary bravery; but how foolish."

But the Boers respect these men who have shown a valour almost unheard-of in modern days, and they leave their bodies lying under the sky and send messengers to the British camp, so that the twenty heroes may have fit burial at the hands of their friends.

The Boers having driven Clements—they thought he was French—as far as Arundel, imagined that they were winning all along the line; so they tried their

hardest to outflank the British position there, so as either to cut our force off, or force it back to Naauwpoort. And the British public, not knowing, of course, anything of Lord Roberts' plan, and hearing of the retirement from one camp one day, and another camp the next, began to take a very gloomy view of things—not knowing, of course, anything at all about the strategy of the thing, nor being able, perhaps, to appreciate it in any case.

But Clements was not to be driven in further than Arundel. He had his orders to stay there; and he fought several smart skirmishes, chiefly with his Australian mounted troops, in order to prevent the Dutchmen from chipping in between himself and Naauwpoort. And so matters stood with the force on this line of railway, what time my Lord Roberts was at Jacobsdal, and General Kelly-Kenny and my Lord Kitchener of Khartoum were spreading their infantry round Cronje's laager at Paardeberg.

In the same sphere of operations to the east of General Clements, and on the south line of railway, Gatacre and Brabant were operating. On the 7th of February the Boers made two attacks—one on Penhoek camp, and the other on the British camp at Bird River. The attack on Penhoek was chiefly an artillery affair, and was probably a feint to cover the attack upon the other camp. Both attacks failed; for a section of Royal Artillery and half a battalion of the Royal Irish Rifles were sent on by train to Bird River, and soon repulsed the attack there. Before these welcome reinforcements arrived, the Cape Mounted Rifles, with their 7-pounder muzzle loading guns and two Maxims, had been holding the fort.

As soon as the British field guns came up and opened fire the Boer artillery ceased, and the British infantry went out wide to make a turning movement. And immediately the Boers saw their flank menaced they retreated on Dordrecht.

The next operation of consequence in this part of the Colony was at Dordrecht, which General Gatacre was determined, if possible, to re-take. He detached for this purpose Brabant's Horse and the Cape Mounted Rifles, whom he sent out on the 16th of February to drive the Free Staters and rebels from the little town that had been taken, re-taken, and taken again.

Seven hundred men went out from Sterkstroom, taking with them five guns, two of which were field guns of the Royal Artillery. They found the Boers entrenched on a long ridge two miles to the west of the town, and at about 9 a.m. they came in touch with them.

The enemy had no artillery, but were snugly entrenched in a position favourable for defence by rifle fire, and they had increased the natural defensiveness of the ridge by building breastworks of loose stones. Moreover, they had burnt the ground in front of the ridge so as to make the men in khaki easily visible as they moved across the blackness.

The fighting was not particularly interesting, except that it showed the value, as a force, of the newly-raised Colonials. These men advanced in extended order across the charred ground under cover of shell fire, saluted immediately they came within range by a rapid fire from riflemen entirely concealed from view. When within about 1,800 yards they lay down, and for hours continued to fire at the ridge with hardly any cover. So the duel continued until daylight disappeared, our artillery shelling the ridge, while our riflemen fired at the parapets of the breastworks.

Then the troops were ordered to bivouac, and tried to sleep, for there would be work for them ere daybreak. But at midnight they were roused, and four companies were told to fix bayonets and march straight up the ridge and carry it with the steel. Silently the Volunteers advanced up the hill, over the boulders and round kloofs. And so they reached a point within sixty yards of the summit without challenge or shot. Then they rushed for the position, hoping to catch the Boers sleeping. But the Dutchmen had heard them, and at that very moment the greater part of them were running for their lives down the side of the hill. There were a few who lagged behind, and Brabant's men demolished these with the cold iron. A few fought—but half-hearted, as they always did when the Englanders came breast to breast with steel, and in very few minutes the laager was ours. Many waggons, with considerable stores and forage, had been abandoned. These our Colonials captured, and then the whole force bivouacked on the ridge.

Next day one of the most curious things in this curious war occurred. Our force was now encamped upon a ridge two miles to the west of Dordrecht, and the Boers had retreated to a hill on the east of that town. Dordrecht itself lies at the very bottom of a hollow, and all that Saturday was witnessed the extraordinary spectacle of a fight going on over the town. The Boers on the east fired on the ridge occupied by the British on the west, and the British replied in kind; and over that sleepy little Cape Dutch town bullets flew and shells screeched.

The Boers had with them, by way of artillery, a 40-pounder Krupp gun, which far outranged anything Brabant could boast of, for he had nothing bigger than the 15-pounders of the Royal Field Artillery. Early in the morning the Cape Mounted Rifles took two miserable 7-pounders (muzzle-loading cannon) down into the plain near the town, with intent to get close enough to be able to shell the big gun of the enemy. This was what schoolboys call "cheek," and after a few rounds the Cape Mounted Rifles were glad enough to get back to the ridge, for their pea-shooters could in no wise compete against the tremendous projectiles of the Krupp gun.

But the 15-pounders were more to the purpose. They got the range, and rained shell after shell on the hill opposite. The Dutch gunners replied with accuracy and speed, and contrived to drop 40-pound shell after 40-pound shell slap into the British position. Luckily the only casualties were to the transport mules; but that was not the fault of the Dutch gunners, it was merely the luck of the Colonial Division.

Then the officer of the field battery laid a gun carefully, and gave the order to fire. The 15-pound shell soared, shrieking over the town in the hollow. It dropped behind a stonework on the hill opposite. The officer followed the flight of the missile through his field-glass. "By God, we've hit it!" They had. After two hours' duel the big fellow had been knocked out, for the 15-pound shell had dropped exactly on him.

For all practical purposes the Boers had no artillery now, and it was thought that Brabant would order an attack with the bayonet under cover of our field guns. But the Colonial general decided to wait until dark, being afraid of the expense of sending his brave fellows to scale a long and steep hill in face of riflemen who

STORMING THE LAAGER AT DORDRECHT.

were plentifully covered. So the opposing forces continued on opposite sides of Dordrecht, exchanging rifle fire, varied by an occasional shell from the British artillery, both sides waiting anxiously for night.

It need hardly be said that the reasons for the anxiety were completely different on the two sides of the town. The Colonial Division wanted to get to closer quarters. The rebels and burghers desired precisely the opposite thing—they intended to trek north under cover of the darkness.

And they did. They took away their dismantled gun and most of their stores, as well as all dead and wounded. And Brabant did not attack at night, he waited until the morning, and then there was no reason to attack, because his scouts brought word that not a Boer was to be seen in the neighbourhood. So the Colonial Division entered Dordrecht, which had now undergone the last of its reoccupations.

There they rested for several days.

It was the intention of General Gatacre, who was expecting every day orders to move up the railway line, to clear the Boers out of Stormberg in this fashion: He himself would advance directly up the line with his full strength: Brabant with the Colonial Division would advance from Dordrecht on a road parallel with and to the right of the railway, as far as a place called Jamestown, which would place him on the left flank of the Dutch position at Stormberg. By this advance Brabant would not only threaten the Stormberg position, but would prevent the Boers from retreating through the Basuto country. For several days Gatacre and Brabant were inactive, until on the 23rd of February the commander of the 3rd Division was ordered up the line.

Taking with him every available man and horse, he advanced from Sterkstroom on Molteno, and without trouble took possession of that town; and the next day, not knowing quite how the enemy stood or in what strength, he resolved to reconnoitre the Stormberg position in force.

Reconnaissances in force are rarely of much use, and never when the object is merely to gain information in a country like north Cape Colony, and against an enemy like the South African Dutchmen. Three intelligent scouts used to the ground will learn as much as three battalions, and indeed a great deal more. But the idea is that by reconnoitring in force you "draw" the enemy. Against some foes such a plan might answer, but not against the Boer. That artless child of nature is just about the last man in the world to reveal his strength or his numbers until the day of battle.

It was on the 23rd of February that General Gatacre moved out of Molteno with four companies of mounted infantry of the Royal Scots, the Fighting Fifth, the Derbyshires and Berkshires, one battalion of infantry, the Sherwood Foresters, a battery and a half of field artillery, an armoured train, a few Cape Police, and seventy-four scouts under de Montmorency. The force moved out along the road leading straight from Molteno to Stormberg, alongside the railway (*see* sketch on p. 267), and they had not ridden more than about four miles when they saw upon the kopjes immediately in front of them numerous parties of the enemy riding about. In order for Gatacre to obtain a view of the enemy's position it was necessary for him to survey it from some hill, and there was such a hill immediately in front of the force. Towards

this kopje there could be seen riding leisurely a small party of mounted men. Said de Montmorency to the general, "Let me ride forward with my scouts and take possession of the hill in front." The commander assented, and de Montmorency set out full tear towards the coveted eminence. Along with the captain rode a fine specimen of a Volunteer officer, Lieut.-Colonel Hoskier, an Artillery volunteer who had left home at duty's call. He had come out with the scouts for a day's fun.

Arrived about half way up the slope, de Montmorency cried "Dismount," whereupon the scouts picketed their horses in a nullah and started at the double up the hill. It was a stiff, steep climb, but de Montmorency made his men hurry, because he wanted to have them all snugly concealed behind the boulders to receive the party of Dutchmen whom he had seen trotting towards the same spot.

But it happened that the Dutchmen had seen the British also, and had made up their minds to occupy the kopje, so as to give a warm reception to Gatacre's men when they should unsuspectingly ride up. In fact two bodies were making for the summit of the hill from opposite sides, each intending to surprise the other.

They both succeeded.

The two parties reached the crest at the same moment, for just as the scouts' heads appeared above the summit the heads of the burghers appeared within thirty yards of them on the other side. Now Greek met Greek. In an instant both parties had thrown themselves to the ground, wriggled behind rocks and loaded their rifles. Unfortunately, the Dutchmen were 300 strong, and were consequently able to maintain a much severer volume of fire than were the scouts.

The rifle duel went on for an hour or more—a duel of enthralling interest to all concerned, a duel in which every man tried to tempt an enemy to show an inch of himself from behind his cover. So close was the range and so deadly accurate the shooting, that two scouts, whose ostrich plumes showed above their boulders, had the feathers shot away; while a Boer who elevated the muzzle of his rifle accidentally, so that the tip was visible, had the rifle knocked out of his hand by a bullet.

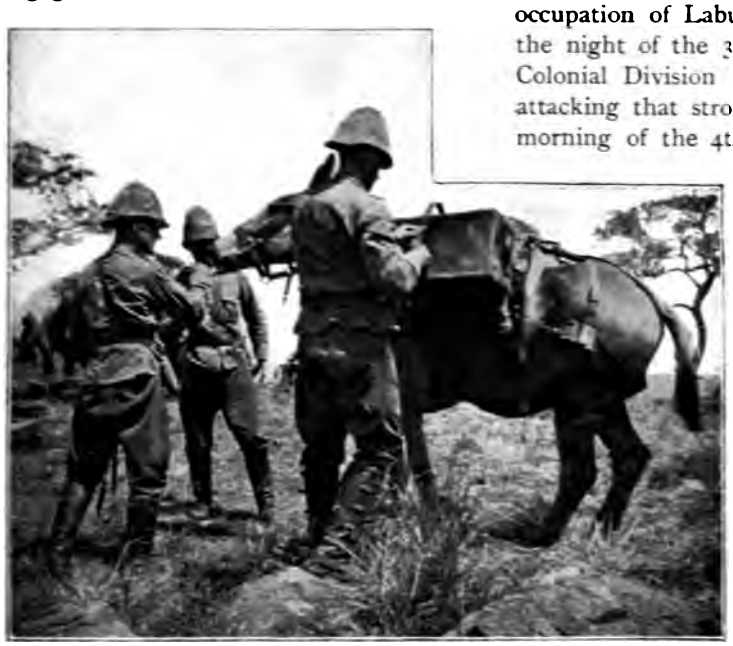
Like the farmer who drank six bottles of claret, neither side was "getting any forrader." Hoskier was shot in the ankle —goodness knows how. He bound up his wound with his handkerchief and continued firing, when, unluckily putting his head out of cover for an instant, a Mauser bullet pierced his brain. "This won't do," said de Montmorency, "six of you come with me, and we'll try to work round and attack them in the flank." So the captain and half a dozen stalwarts wriggled painfully down for a few yards, and then began to creep round the top of the hill, thinking to create a diversion by getting close up and by the side of the enemy.

But alas for the British army, alas for the 21st Lancers. In making this movement de Montmorency exposed himself unprotected to the merciless marksmen of the foe. Once his rifle spoke, and then he rolled over with half a score of bullets through lungs and brain.

So perished de Montmorency, a man who had won the highest distinction known to the British soldier almost before he had hair on his face. The hero of one tremendous charge; of fifty skirmishes; a daring scout and a dashing leader; a

man of whom his country hoped much—he died the victim of his daring.

Well was it for the scouts that a strong force was behind them, else in all probability not a man would have escaped. As it was, Gatacre was obliged to send a detachment to attack their assailants and engage their attention while the sorrowful scouts escaped. But they left three dead and seven wounded on the hill—a heavy price to pay for no result.



AN AMMUNITION MULE'S LOAD.

While this sad event was in progress, the reconnaissance continued and the British guns came into action, while the mounted infantry and the Derbyshires advanced as though to the attack. Uselessly. For the wily Boers refused to be drawn, and the reconnaissance failed in this object.

Gatacre must have chafed; and, indeed, no more disheartening position could be conceived than that of this man of iron will and boundless energy, who found himself with such a small force that he could do practically nothing.

But Brabant was on the move two days after, and in accordance with the plan that had been arranged, he advanced due north and took Jamestown. But he found the Boers still covered Stormberg by their occupation of Labuschagne's Nek; so on the night of the 3rd of March he set the Colonial Division in motion, bent upon attacking that stronghold. Early on the morning of the 4th of March he came in touch with them, his force then consisting of 1,800 men. In the early morning Brabant roused his troops from a bivouac and advanced up the western portion of the ridge towards the fort which the Boers had erected. To his surprise, no opposition was offered, and what was his joy to find that the enemy had carelessly left their stronghold entirely unprotected while they had gone to sleep and breakfast in their laager in the valley.

The Colonials of Brabant's Horse and the Cape Mounted Rifles manned the fort exultantly, for they believed that the Boers would come back after breakfast, and then it was expected that the Dutchmen would receive a most unwelcome surprise. So it befel. About an hour and a half after sunrise parties of rebels and Free Staters began to mount the ridge quite unsuspectingly. Unfortunately, their suspicions were aroused when they were within about

400 yards of the fort. But by that time they were well within range, and the Colonials poured in a tremendous fusillade, which strewed the hillside with victims. The Dutchmen who were unhurt bolted to cover and back to the laager; but the British guns had now been placed in position, and these shelled the laager, and the eastern shoulder of the hill where the enemy were still in force.

To understand the position you must know that the nek was a pass, or low ground, between the two hills, which together formed a mountain. Brabant's men had surprised the fort and taken possession of one of these hills; but the Boers still held the other, so that the forces faced each other with the nek between them. All that day a heavy rifle duel was in progress, and the gunners on each side cast shells briskly. Brabant sent a force of about 500 to work up the position held by the enemy. The movement was successful partially. For the Colonials attacked some of the outlying trenches and carried them, though they were unable to rush the main position. But when night fell two field guns were sent up to the point which the 500 had last carried, and these were mounted, and protecting walls built to cover them from rifle fire; and when morning broke, and the British gunners went to take a sighting shot, they found that these two guns could easily command the Boer position. The Boers discovered it also, and decided that the place was too hot to hold.

Wherefore they dismantled their guns and trekked with haste, and with such speed that although the Cape Mounted Rifles pursued as hard as they were able, they could not come up with the foe. But one thing Brabant was able to do. He threw a party round to the west of the enemy and cut them off from Stormberg, so that they were obliged to retreat north, in the direction of Aliwal North. Although the pursuit was not so effective as it might have been, it was close enough to cause the Dutchmen to abandon waggon after waggon, as well as the greater part of their cattle. They had to be content with saving their guns.

This operation, the first important piece of fighting in which the Colonial Division was engaged, was entirely successful. Stormberg was now open to attack—the Boer commandoes had been separated, and could only be re-united by the Stormberg force retiring to join hands with the defeated commando. Which they did the same day (March 5th), and Gatacre immediately threw himself into Stormberg with his whole force. And the success had been obtained at little cost — thirteen killed and twenty-six wounded, most of whom were of the Cape Mounted Rifles.

Thus Gatacre took Stormberg in the end without a fight, and the credit of it must be accorded to the Colonial general and his force of Volunteers—not forgetting the Royal Artillery.

CHAPTER LI.

TOWARDS LADYSMITH ONCE MORE—THE CAPTURE OF VAAL KRANTZ.

AFTER the retreat consequent upon the failure of Warren's operation on the left flank, the army of Natal rested awhile.

Over sixteen hundred men had been lost in killed, wounded, and missing during the fighting round Spion Kop. And now one saw the immense resources of Britain, and was able to contrast them with the puny reserve of the South African Republics. For there poured into Natal reinforcements—two new squadrons of cavalry, and drafts for various infantry regiments: in all, 2,400 men.* In addition, Sir Redvers Buller received another battery of horse artillery and two guns of position of the same kind, though not of the same make, as the Boer "Long Toms."

Thus the army of Natal was stronger both in men and guns than it had been before its late repulse. The Boers, on the other hand, having already in the field every man and youth big enough and well enough to hold a rifle, had to count as irretrievably lost every single burgher who fell. So that, although victorious, they were 500 weaker than they had been before Warren arrived at Trichardt's, while the British were quite 1,000 stronger.

Sir Redvers Buller was determined to break through to Ladysmith, seeing that he had failed to get round, and he speedily evolved a new plan of action.

About two and a half miles from Potgeiter's Drift, in the direction of Colenso, the river takes a bend to the north and forms a big loop. On our side, at the opening of the loop, was a hill called Zwart Kop, or Black Hill, a flat-topped eminence rather better wooded than most South African hills, and standing by itself. It was almost due east of Mount Alice, where the naval guns had been stationed during the Spion Kop operations.

On the Boer side of the river, at the side and end of the loop, was another hill called Vaal Krantz, and about two miles north of Zwart Kop. Vaal Krantz was really the termination of the Brakfontein ridge, of which we have heard before, and was narrow-backed, rocky, and desolate-looking, with only a tree here and there standing solitary upon its slopes. It ended in a steep hill called Vaal Kop.

General Buller had made up his mind to seize Zwart Kop, and mount his heavy guns there. Then, bringing his troops along the river bank, he would throw them across to the opposite side, and under cover of the guns on the kop would assault and carry Vaal Krantz, and so reach round to the Ladysmith road, which ran across by Skiet Drift.

* A draft is the term used for a number of men sent to take the place of those who have been killed, wounded, or captured in time of war, or whose service has expired in time of peace. In peace time the rule is that one battalion of an infantry regiment is kept at home, and the other sent abroad, and the home battalion is practically used as a training school for men, to keep up the strength of the foreign battalion.

The first thing to be done in furtherance of this plan of operations was to put the artillery on the top of Zwart Kop; and on January 30th the Royal Engineers began to make a road along which the guns could travel. All that day and the next they laboured, making something like level a track which led from an existing road north of Mount Alice along the valley to the back of the hill. The last hundred yards or so of the ascent was as steep, almost, as the side of a house, and the sappers were about to make a winding track round to the top of the hill, when there appeared upon the scene Lieut. Ogilvy, R.N., and Lieut. James, R.N. The two sailor men, seeing what a waste of time it would be if the Engineers had to make a winding road, went to Sir Redvers Buller and told him that if the sappers would clear the way straight up, they, the two lieutenants, would haul the guns up in their own way. Buller believed them, as anyone would have believed. For there is nothing on earth a first lieutenant of one of her Majesty's ships cannot do. He is the incarnation of capacity. For him obstacles exist only to be conquered.

So for the last hundred yards the Engineers merely smoothed a wide, steep track, and Ogilvy and James, with some of their handy-men, fixed up ropes and pulleys to two trees on the summit. All the two days of the 30th and the 31st of January the sappers laboured at their road, and on the 1st of February the artillery, drawn by horses and mules and oxen, lumbered along it to the foot of the kop; and on the night of February 1st, under cover of the darkness, so as not to be disturbed by Boer gunners on Vaal Krantz, the Naval Brigade laboured in its own inimitable fashion. The guns were drawn up by their teams to the spot where the sheer ascent began. Then the draught animals were taken out, and gun after gun was hauled up the steepness by the ropes and pulleys and muscular arms and brawny backs of the handy-men.

The drivers and the gunners of the Royal Artillery wondered and looked. They had been campaigning with the sailors too long now to be astonished at anything the Jacks might do; but if anything could have surprised them, it was the ease and celerity with which the bluejackets hauled gun after gun up that formidable ascent. That night six naval 12-pounders and two field guns went up with only one accident, which occurred when a 12-pounder, running against a rock in the dark, was upset.

The next day a mountain battery, carried by mules, was sent up also; and after losing a few of the animals, who tumbled backwards down the hillside, this reinforcement arrived in safety. As to the 4·7 guns, they remained on Mount Alice, for their range was so great that they could join in the battle even at that distance.

At last, eight days after the re-crossing of the Tugela, the whole force was put in motion. Lyttelton's Brigade was still on the north side of Potgeiter's Drift at Krantz Kloof, and Warren had marched with his whole division to the south side of Potgeiter's, where the Lancashire Brigade crossed and marched to Krantz Kloof. General Woodgate, wounded on Spion Kop, had died, and the four Lancashire battalions were now commanded by Brigadier-General Wynne. It was intended that Wynne should make a demonstration straight up from Krantz Kloof along the Potgeiter's Drift road

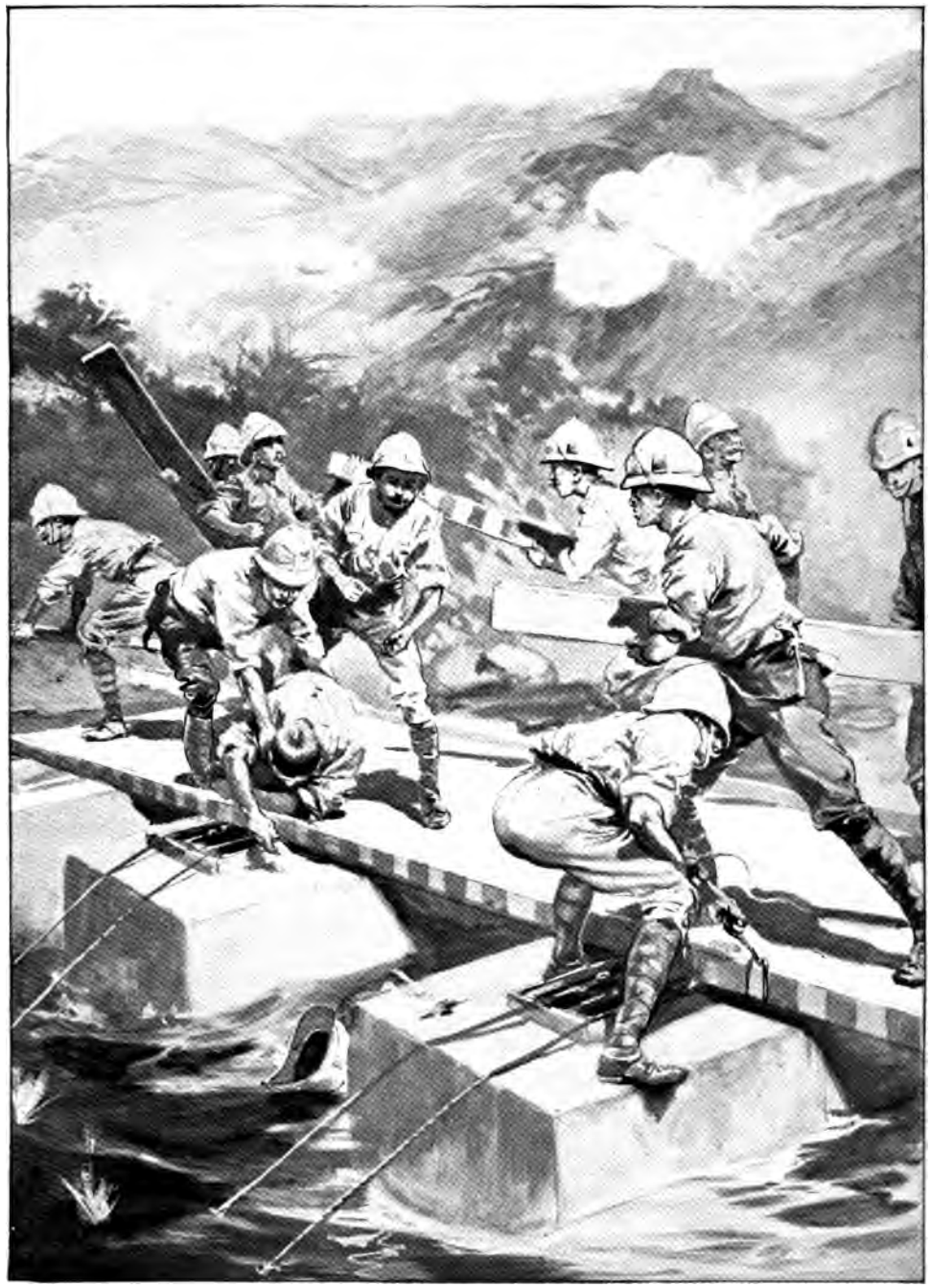
towards the main Boer position on Brakfontein ridge, while, at the same time, Lyttelton's brigade should march on to Vaal Krantz.

But as Lyttelton, if he had kept to the same side of the river, would have been obliged to make a very long march round a loop, it was provided that he should re-cross at Potgeiter's and march along the south side of the river across the mouth of the loop, and cross again by a pontoon bridge nearly half way between Zwart Kop and Vaal Krantz.

Wynne's Brigade, after making its demonstration, was to retire, and was also to attack Vaal Krantz. To enable him to do this by the shorter route, a pontoon bridge was constructed at the end of the entrance to the loop on the left-hand side of Zwart Kop. The tactics of General Buller appear to have been as follows: to make it appear that Wynne was about to make a frontal attack on Brakfontein, and that the troops massed about Zwart Kop were to cross by the pontoon bridge to his assistance, whereas, in fact, the pontoon bridge was thrown across the stream to enable Wynne to retire. The second pontoon bridge was to be thrown across on the opposite side of the loop to the right of Zwart Kop while Wynne was making his feint. By the second pontoon bridge Lyttelton, with his brigade of Fusiliers, was to hurl himself across and make the real attack—namely, on Vaal Krantz.

As soon as this was done Wynne was to retire across the first pontoon, march across the loop, taking his pontoon with him, and, throwing it across about half a mile higher up than Lyttelton, was to attack Vaal Krantz also, to mislead the enemy into believing that Wynne's brigade was really about to assault Brakfontein ridge. His advance was to be covered by the naval 4·7's on Mount Alice, the howitzer battery, and six batteries of field artillery. Surely all this strength of guns would deceive even the wily Boer. And it would not seem at all strange to him from past experience that the British general should once more hurl his infantry at the front of a well fortified and strongly-defended position. For such a position Brakfontein was. The Boers had constructed trench behind trench, and so steep was the ridge that they were able to make tiers of trenches, and besides these a whole line of strong redoubts. In front they had carefully laid barbed wire entanglements to stop the British infantry if they should ever get near enough to attempt a bayonet rush. And, indeed, of all the strong places of defence held by the Dutchmen in that country, naturally so difficult, one would be inclined to award the palm to the position on Brakfontein ridge.

Early in the morning of the 5th of February, Brigadier-General Wynne advanced towards Brakfontein, slowly and steadily. In front marched the York and Lancaster Regiment; next to them the South Lancashires, with the Royal Lancasters and the Lancashire Fusiliers in reserve. Behind walked thirty-six guns of six field batteries, and at 7 a.m. the first battery unlimbered and pitched the first shell into Brakfontein ridge. It was the opening of a new trial of strength. Not that the shell did very much harm, for the Dutchmen had warily contrived to make to themselves bomb-proof shelters, in which they were perfectly secure from shrapnel, and in these, like Baden-Powell at Mafeking, they sat tight. One by one the field batteries unlimbered, until at 7.30 a.m. the whole of the thirty-six guns



"THEY SIMPLY WORKED ON" (*p.* 627).

were barking at the ridge with fury and determination.

Very soon the Boer batteries began to reply, and quickly there followed the giant's cough of the 4·7's. Soon the Boer artillery ceased to fire, being convinced that it would be better for them to let the *rooineks* get closer, so that rifles could come into play. Indeed, the way in which these farmers treated the hail of shells which flew into their positions was altogether admirable and not a little contemptuous.

Slowly and deliberately the Lancashire Brigade moved north. They were spread out in that open order which was their only safety—the open order which our generals had learned from bitter experience to be absolutely necessary. At last the leading battalion came within about 1,800 yards of the Boer trenches, and then Wynne ordered them to take cover and begin firing. And now, for the first time, the Mausers spoke, and for an hour rifle answered rifle. But the firing was desultory in character, nothing like the furious discharges which had marked the battle of Colenso. Then General Wynne ordered an advance, and for about a quarter of a mile the brigade skirmished forward quietly and cautiously, taking care that no man should expose himself more than was absolutely necessary. And all the time the great naval guns showered lyddite on Spion Kop and Brakfontein, and the howitzers grunted and vomited lyddite also, and the six field batteries barked and barked again. The din was terrible, and if the bite of the guns had been as deadly as their bark was deafening, not a Dutchman would have been left alive between the Tugela and Lang's Nek.

And the Boers sat in the little underground rooms they had dug for themselves and smoked their pipes and laughed cynically, and wondered when the *rooineks* would come within rifle shot.

While the feint attack was developing along the road from Potgeiter's the really serious business of the day was begun on the other side of the river. The section of Royal Engineers started at about ten o'clock out from the back of Zwart Kop towards the bank of the Tugela, carrying with them, in waggons, pontoons sufficient to make a bridge.

The place at which they were to throw their bridge over was known as Munger's Drift, and the advantage of placing the pontoon bridge here was that the high banks on either side of the river had been cut away to form the drift.

With the Engineers went a company of the Scottish Rifles by way of covering party, whose mission it was to protect the sappers while the bridge was being built. The British bridging party reached the river bank without let or hindrance, and immediately began their important business.

Now there were Boers on Vaal Krantz, and on a ridge immediately opposite Munger's Drift, which ridge was known as Doorn Kloof, and on Doorn Kloof was artillery. Moreover, between Doorn Kloof and the drift were many deep dongas, forming splendid natural cover for riflemen, and here the Boers massed. But, strange to relate, the sappers were allowed to build several sections of the bridge without interruption.

Then it seemed to dawn upon the enemy that something was afoot, and immediately they began to pour in upon the bridge-builders a hot and terrible fire from their rifles and a machine gun. But the sappers worked on, minding no more the leaden hail than they would have minded

a shower of rain, though here and there a man fell groaning.

The covering party of the Scottish Rifles did their best to keep down the fire of the Dutchmen, and, to some extent, succeeded; but, unfortunately, the Boers had such wealth of cover that they could easily shift from one position to another when it suited them. And the Royal Engineers, from the very nature of their work, could take no cover. They simply worked on, hauling a rope here, tying a knot there, pushing on first one section and then another with an indifference to death and danger that could only be called sublime.

Seeing that their riflemen and their Maxim gun made so little impression upon the *rooineks*, the Boers brought further pressure to bear in the shape of three heavy pieces of artillery—to wit, a 40-pounder and two 12-pounders. Shell after shell plashed into the water. Now and again a shrapnel would burst in front of the workers and scatter shrieking showers of bullets round and over them. By God's special grace not one of the 40-pounders struck the bridge, and so the work went on.

The Royal Engineers, the "sappers and miners" of the British army, have never been lacking in courage. When occasion arises they can fight with the best—as witness Digby Jones, the hero of Wagon Hill, and many another hero who has carried "*Ubique*," "*Quo Fas et Gloria ducunt*" deep into the ranks of the enemy. But the courage of your sapper is more usually shown by the coolness with which he allows himself to be shot at, rather than by any attempt to head a charge or stem a rush. It is his to lay a bomb under the gates of Delhi and fire it, himself the target of 10,000 muskets. It is his to carry a coil of wire about and lay a telegraph when shrapnel whistles about his ears. It is his to dig a trench as a protection for others, though bullets strike him as he handles the spade. It is his to throw a bridge across a river for the passage of the army, though he himself be slain in the building.

Any Briton, whether his home be in these islands, or in those continents and parts of continents where the Union Jack waves and freedom grows, can charge any foe, no matter what the odds. But to wield a spade, to build a bridge, when death in fifty forms fills the whole air around, requires courage of a sort not common even in the Anglo-Saxon race.

In this manner the sappers and miners worked superhumanly until noon that day, and then they were able to report that the pontoon at Munger's Drift was finished, and ready for the passage of the army.

While this was going on, General Wynne and his Lancastrians had deployed along a front of enormous width. There was no particular distance between the files, for every man was instructed to take such cover as he could find. Lying behind ant-heaps and rocks and bushes, here and there a section or a half-company down a donga, the two battalions kept up a constant fire at about 1,800 yards upon Brakfontein. And at 1,800 yards they might have remained, had it not been that the scheme in hand made it necessary for them to pretend that they were there in order to rush the Boer position. And to lend colour to the deception, at about 9.30 a.m. both battalions advanced to within about 1,500 yards. During the advance they were subject to some fire of musketry; but the range was so great, that if anyone had been hit it would have

"DASHED OVER THE NEXT KNOLL . . . AND CAPTURED IT" (*p.* 635).

been accidental. For, as has been said before, no rifleman can shoot with accuracy at much more than 1,000 yards.

At 10 a.m. Wynne began slowly to retire, as though his attack had failed. He kept his infantry in position until the last, and began his retirement by sending away the field batteries. These were ordered to retire slowly, one at a time, across the pontoon bridge in the loop near Zwart Kop.

As soon as the first battery limbered up and began to walk away, the Boer artillery, hitherto silent on this side, woke up. A huge gun on Spion Kop started a furious cannonade of the field batteries. Two other heavy guns and a 12-pounder from the same position also rained shells fast and furious upon the British gunners. A pom-pom from Brakfontein joined the chorus, and it is hard to conceive any more terrible position than that of the field batteries.

They were out in the open. The Boer guns easily had the range of them, and had also a great superiority in weight. But the batteries retired slowly and in order. "Batteries should always retire at a walk." And it was at a very slow walk indeed that the Royal Artillery retreated on this occasion. While the first battery was making its way across the pontoon bridge, the others stood to their guns and hurled, as though in defiance, shrapnel upon the enemy. Great shells burst amongst the limbers. Here a horse went down, its leg broken by a shell. Shoot the poor beast and put it out of its misery. There another had its back broken. But gunner and driver, officer and private, remained as cool as though the Dutchmen were firing nothing more deadly than blank cartridge. Colonel Montgomery was wounded by a shrapnel bullet. He was carefully and tenderly placed upon a waggon and carried from the field.

One waggon had all its horses shot. What was to be done? Should it be abandoned to the enemy? For answer two non-commissioned officers and a few drivers seized the waggon, and hauled it out of the field by sheer force under a hot fire the whole way.

And so, for the space of two hours or more, the guns were under fire. Lucky it was for them that the Boer shells did not burst so dangerously as they might have done. The gunnery, so far as aim was concerned, was of the best, and the British artillerymen were fain to confess that the Dutchmen were no duffers at the game. But the shells did not seem to be well charged, and this, and this alone, accounts for the fact that the field batteries got away at all.

By one o'clock the guns were all on the other side of the river; and Wynne gave orders for the infantry to retire. The men rose from their cover, faced about, and walked slowly and sullenly back. Then from trench upon trench, whence hitherto only an occasional sniping shot had come, there burst a terrible fusillade—such a fusillade, in fact, as had greeted the battalions at Colenso. It would have been small disgrace to the Lancashire lads if they had retired at the double. But they did not. Instead, they walked off at no more than three miles an hour, sullenly and unbrokenly, pursued by the messengers of death. Twenty-three men fell ere the infantry were out of range; and these their comrades carried off. And by half-past two in the afternoon the whole of the Lancashire Brigade had crossed by the pontoon bridge (A^1) and reached the shelter of Zwart Kop.

Now let us return to the main business, that is, the attack on Vaal Krantz.

Lyttelton, that dashing soldier, had been placed in charge of the attack; and he led his brigade, consisting of three rifle regiments and the Durham Light Infantry, down to Munger's Drift. To the Durhams had been assigned the honour of storming Vaal Krantz itself. To the 1st Rifle Brigade was entrusted another part of the attack, as will appear shortly; while the 3rd King's Royal Rifles and the 2nd Scottish Rifles were to act in support of the other two battalions.

With joyful heart and firm tread the Durhams crossed the pontoon bridge. From Doorn Kloof and the dongas in front, from some dongas on their right, and from Vaal Krantz on their left, rifles cracked and cannon boomed, and pom-poms and maxims stammered and stuttered. Arriving on the further bank, the Durhams deployed and faced towards Vaal Krantz, thus exposing themselves to an enfilading

fire from Doorn Kloof and the broken ground in front of it. But the hardy Northern men took no account of this. In front of them was the position they had come to storm, and on their right front was a farm called Munger's Farm, held by a large body of the enemy's marksmen. Lyttelton ordered them to spread out like a fan. Two-thirds of the curved line marched forward on Vaal Krantz, while the other one-third made for the farmhouse.

Now the attack began. From Zwart Kop opened the naval 12-pounders and the field guns that had been carried there by the bluejackets. From the ground on the left of the kop the big siege guns threw lyddite. From Krantz Kloof the howitzer battery spoke; while innumerable field guns from the open ground within the loop and front of Zwart Kop barked as they vomited shrapnel. Altogether, seventy guns, big and little, joined action on the British side, with a din such as nobody, perhaps, ever heard before, and all directed their fire upon Vaal Krantz and Doorn Kloof. It was covering infantry attack by shell-fire with a vengeance.

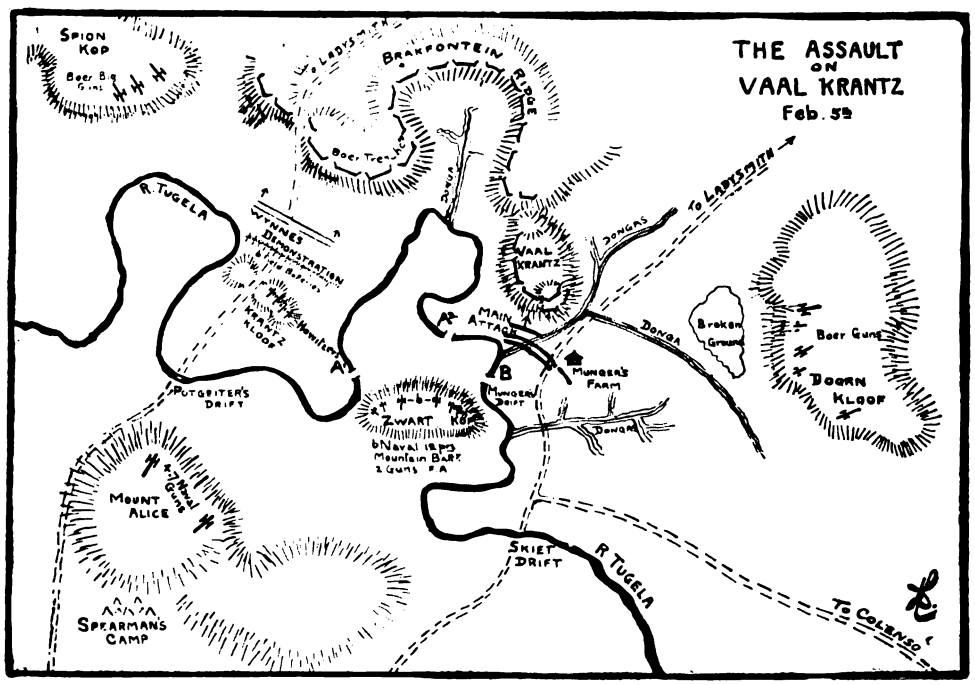
The Boer gunners, though outnumbered, pluckily responded for a time; but a balloon was at work for the assailants, and aëronauts discovered the position of the defenders' pieces, one after the other, and telephoned the information to the gunners below. As soon as the position of a Boer gun was located, the British artillery vomited upon it a hail of projectiles; and so, in a short space, every one of them was silenced, with the exception of a big 100-pounder Creusot, which could not be accurately discerned, and which continued to pitch its gigantic missiles now at the guns, now at the advancing infantry.

The Durhams advanced to the assault in grand style. This was the first time they had had a chance to distinguish themselves, and they were not slow to take advantage of the opportunity. The first battle was for the possession of Munger's Farm. Here a strong party of Dutchmen had entrenched themselves in the farmhouse and farm buildings, and they kept up a hot and heavy fire as the sturdy Light Infantry marched across to get at Vaal Krantz.

But the Durhams had no time to deal with these, though the Mausers sent bullets whistling the whole width of their ranks. They left the protection of the flank to the King's Royal Rifles, who were following after in support. The 60th detached four companies, under Major Lamb, to sweep round upon the farmhouse and speak with the marksmen there. Away went the boys of the K.R.R. straight for the foe, never swerving a hair's-breadth from the most direct line of advance, though they had to leave many a comrade on the veldt to be picked up next day by the ambulance men.

At about 500 yards from the position, the companies laid down and opened fire, and thence, by a series of short, determined rushes, managed to get within about 200 yards of the farmhouse. Another rush would take them within storming distance, and the hands of the 60th began to itch for the steel. But the Boers in the farmhouse had no mind to be charged. They saw that, despite their rifles, the khaki line was drawing nearer and nearer, and, dreading the last rush, which would bring the foe within thrusting distance, they gradually left their position and retired to the hills behind. But they were obliged to leave a few of their number to keep up a show of resistance to the end; and when the word came, and

the Rifles jumped to their feet and rushed at the farmhouse, a few tangle-bearded Dutchmen fell to the bayonet. A few threw down their rifles and surrendered; but the infantrymen were ill pleased. They had much rather the whole garrison had remained to meet them. But still, it was first blood to them. They had, in excellent style, carried the first position; and they made all speed to join the main part of the battalion, which was now pushing along the bank of the river with all speed to Vaal Krantz.



SKETCH-MAP OF VAAL KRANTZ AND NEIGHBOURING POSITIONS.

A¹—First Pontoon Bridge. A²—Second Pontoon Bridge. B—Munger's Drift Bridge.

At the end which our men were to attack, Vaal Krantz terminates in a kopje known as Vaal Kop, a hill of precipitous steepness on its southern side. It was this side that the Durhams were to assault. Straight ahead the khaki line marched, now halting and lying down to pour in a volley or two, now rushing over the broken ground, covering another 200 or 300 yards, and so drawing nearer and nearer to Vaal Kop.

From the top and the upper slopes Mausers cracked; and more than one gallant fellow pitched forward on his face as the rest of the line rushed on undaunted. The heat was terrible, and the Durhams were more troubled by their thirst than by the bullets of the enemy. So, before delivering the final rush, the colonel of the battalion ordered all his men to fill their water-bottles at the Tugela. Then the line formed up again, and the Durham Light Infantry prepared to scale the height in front.

At first the kop was not very steep.

The boulders made the ascent difficult, and it was impossible for the men to keep line. But on they pressed, the Mausers from above still spitting at them viciously, until at last they reached a point within about 120 yards of the summit—the point at which the hill began to be precipitous. Then for a moment or two they laid down, taking cover from the boulders, what time they fired many a volley at the summit. But this lying down and firing was not at all to their taste; they longed to be up the hill, and face to face with the enemy. It was a task that might have daunted the most daring; for, leaving out the enemy on the top, the climb itself was a terrible piece of work under such a sun.

"Durhams—fix bayonets!" The voice of the colonel rang out clear and loud. With a stifled cheer, every man wrenched his few inches of steel from its scabbard and clashed it on the barrel. The line was now a porcupine of points.

"Durhams—charge!" You would have thought those hardy North-countrymen were running a race across the flat, so swiftly did they fly up the mountain side. Bullets whistled overhead and round and spattered the ground in front. Here and there a soldier stumbled for a moment, then fell with horrid clatter down the slope. But, with a cheer, deep-chested, full throated, the line dashed on. They could see now a few slouch hats, a few heads showing above boulders, a few rifle barrels pointed above the trenches. Another shout. The officers in the front wave their helmets and yell to their hardy lads to follow. Small need of that. The men are fully as anxious to get there as the officers to lead them. In two minutes, that might be two life-times, the Durhams have breasted the slope and are in amongst the trenches at the top.

And, as happened not once but a hundred times in that campaign, the farmers grew affrighted as the bayonets gleamed before their eyes. So nearly all fled with the speed of mortal terror, some throwing down their rifles that they might run the faster. With shouts of vengeance, the fierce men of Durham pursued. And here and there a brown-helmeted lad in khaki thrust in the steel and yelled with triumph. And in ten minutes from the order to fix bayonets, Vaal Kop was clear of Boers, save some score or so who lay dead or bleeding upon its inhospitable rocks.

There is a kaffir, wounded. Hullo! What is that? The man carries a rifle and bandolier! An odd thing in a white man's war. But still he is human, and wounded. So Lieutenant Lambton of the Durhams—there are Lambtons everywhere in South Africa—goes up to him to succour him. The kaffir lets him get close up, then fires, and shoots his would-be helper through the hand. The poor wretch has been told that if the English catch him they will flay him alive; so he is resolved to take the price of his skin. Ten prisoners were taken—not all Boers or Africkanders. An Irish-American is one.

It was a wonderful charge, this rush of the Durham Light Infantry. Wonderful, not merely because of the strength of the position, but because of the extraordinary difficulties of the ground. Imagine, if you can, a battalion charging up the last hundred yards of Scafell Peak, or the last hundred yards of Ben Nevis, and you will form some notion of what the Durhams did. And if you know either of the two mountains named, try to think how hard it would be to reach the top at the double,

carrying in your hand and on your back more than a quarter of a hundredweight of equipment and arms. Little wonder that the officers of the Durhams were proud of their men, or that the Boers were amazed at the exploit.

Let us now cast our eye on the other part of the attack—that of the 60th Rifles. The task of this battalion was to clear the ground to the right, and the 60th set about the business with a cool courage and determination altogether admirable.

Colonel Norcott was in command, and he marched his men in loose order from the pontoon along the river bank on the heels of the Durhams. The regiment was under a tremendous fire for more than a mile from the Boer riflemen to the right and the Boer guns on Doorn Kloof, as well as from the farmhouse.

HAULING AMMUNITION UP ZWART KOP.

Norcott handled his men well, taking them down into the river bed as soon as he could, and so finding cover under which they could advance for a mile. Then the battalion was split in two, the right half under the senior major, Lamb, and the rest under the colonel. The right half swung round and marched on the farmhouse, whence they swung round and dealt with the sharpshooters who were harassing both them and the Durhams with an incessant fire.

The 100-pounder on Doorn Kloof shelled them heavily, a Maxim, concealed in a donga, raked their ranks, and close by Munger's Farm was a small kopje ablaze with musketry. It was a mercy that the Dutchmen of 1900 were not such marksmen as their ancestors; had they been, Lamb's companies would have been slain to a man. For they were marching across open farm land, with no better protection or concealment than the sprouting mealie crops.

The fire to which the King's Royal Rifles were subjected was far more con-

centrated and tremendous than anything the Durhams had to face. But when was the 60th known to quail? With firm and confident tread the long loose line of lively lads in khaki tramped on and on, through the growing corn, regardless of shell and bullet, of Maxim and Creusot. With a determination not to be denied, the 60th swept on past the farmhouse, swept round to the left, and charged the kopje where the enemy's marksmen clustered thickest.

Here they fixed bayonets, and it was a magnificent sight to see the Rifles heading for the top of the kopje, though men were wounded and slain at every yard. As usual, the Boers did not wait the onset, and the 60th drove them out of their position rather by the determination of the advance than by the bayonet. The Maxim gun was hastily dragged away, and the Boers mounted their ponies and galloped for the rear of Vaal Krantz. Then Lamb led his four companies round again to support the main attack, aiming for a point a little higher up than Vaal Kop, which the Durhams now held.

Vaal Kop, the hill which formed the extremity of Vaal Krantz, was connected with the rest of the ridge by a nek, and it was towards this nek that both halves of the Rifle Battalion bent their steps. They were intended to reunite at that point, so as to clear the nek if it should be held by the enemy. The movement was timed to a minute, and the battalions reunited on the slope just before reaching the top of the kopje. But the enemy had fled from this part and had concentrated on the northern crest of the ridge.

The pontoon bridge creaked and groaned under the weight of men as battalion after battalion poured across it. The Scottish Rifles hurried over and marched straight on Vaal Krantz to reinforce the Durhams and the 60th. Hildyard took most of his brigade across and sent the Devons to hold Munger's farmhouse. The South African Light Horse trotted over and spread themselves out to clear the ground directly opposite the drift to the east, whence riflemen in dongas were keeping up a spattering but unpleasant fire. It had been intended to send artillery over, so as to mount it on the captured part of Vaal Krantz; but this, for some reason, was never done.

It was now late in the afternoon, about four o'clock, and the Durhams pulled themselves together again, dashed to the next knoll on Vaal Krantz and captured it.

But the ridge was by no means in our possession. Indeed, the position was not unlike that in which we stood after the Lancashire men had rushed the summit of Spion Kop. We held one end of the position, but were without artillery; and the Boers held with artillery the rest of the position, and, moreover, had guns in other places whence they could shell with great ease our infantry on Vaal Kop. In fact, though the movement had been successful so far as it went, though Buller had again crossed the Tugela at slight expense, we were practically no nearer to Ladysmith than we had been a week before. The truth is that General Buller was fighting in the dark. The Tugela itself he knew by this time, and to all intents and purposes that river was little of an obstacle to him now. He began to find that the real difficulty was not the river, but the hills behind it.

It is difficult for any person to imagine, unless he has actually seen the country, the extraordinary nature of the ground between the Tugela and Ladysmith. There is nothing in the British islands to be compared to it. You overcome the obstacle

of one hill or mountain only to find that it is commanded from twenty other peaks. No one hill seemed to be the key of the position. For the mountains were not a range so much as a series of groups, forming a seemingly endless number of peaks. Mountain warfare is always difficult ; but there is usually some pass, which, if seized, will enable an assault to turn the whole range. Or there is some hill which, if carried, commands the country round it. But here Nature seemed to have played tricks with the earth. There was not a single hill commanding the country ahead. And the worst of it was that General Buller had no survey map in the slightest degree reliable to inform him what fresh obstacles he might encounter if he overcame those in the immediate front.

About four o'clock in the afternoon two events happened. First, the gunners of a naval 12-pounder on Zwart Kop pitched a shell at Doorn Kloof. The missile soared majestically across the country, and as it dropped the sailors saw with delight the smoke and flame of a tremendous explosion. They thought they had knocked out the Creüsot giant, and great was their glee. But they had been by no means so fortunate. All they had done was to drop a shell into an ammunition waggon, which blew up and threw a few Dutchmen into the air. "Long Tom" presently joined again in the fray with energy unabated.

The other event was at Vaal Krantz. The Boers, apparently ashamed of having been driven out of the strong position of Vaal Kop by a comparatively small force, attempted to regain possession. Some thousand riflemen dismounted and attacked along the crest. Lyttelton, however, had made the most of his time by throwing up sangars along the slope, and behind these the Durhams and the 60th crouched with rifles charged. The Boers came on boldly enough, creeping almost invisible from boulder to boulder, after the style which they had made their own, and in which they were unrivalled.

As they advanced they fired continuously and straight at the little fortifications of the British infantry, aiming at the parapet, so that no man might dare to show a head above the stones. But the King's Royal Rifles and the Durham Light Infantry were soldiers as cool as any to be found, and well they sustained—and indeed enhanced—the reputation of British marksmen. The Boers crept on, losing here and there a man until they were within 300 yards of the British line. And our infantry were delighted to see them coming so near, for if they came much closer there would be some bayonet play.

But Neville Lyttelton did not intend to try the bayonet until the last resort. Of course his men could have rushed at the Boers and swept them out as a housemaid clears away a cobweb. But the process would have been expensive. A bayonet charge presupposes that the men who deliver it stand up, and to stand up meant to expose the whole line to the fury of rifle fire at close range. So Lyttelton kept his men in hand and directed volley after volley upon the assailants—volleys so furious and so accurate that the Dutchmen saw how hopeless their task was. So they sullenly retired by the way they came ; crawling back from shelter to shelter in their own marvellous manner, losing here and there a man, but not more, perhaps, than one-tenth of the number that British troops would have lost in such a retirement.

Until seven o'clock in the evening there was desultory firing all along the line from Zwart Kop to Vaal Krantz. The Naval

guns and the field batteries continued their horrid din and hurled tons of shells into the Boer positions. Then night fell and the fighting ceased.

In the night the British were not idle. bridge (A²), to enable troops to be sent to the Krantz, by marching along our side of the river and crossing near the foot of Vaal Kop so as to avoid the fire of the guns and rifles from Doorn Kloof. They, therefore,

THE K.R.R. ADVANCING THROUGH THE MEALIES.

Lyttelton's Brigade, warned by the fate of the Lancastrians on Spion Kop, proceeded to heap up barriers of stone to protect themselves against the artillery and machine guns which they knew full well would be turned on them in the morning. High up in the bend of the river near the foot of Vaal Krantz the sappers were erecting another pontoon took the pontoon across which Wynne's Brigade had retired in the morning, and by Herculean efforts threw it across about a mile higher than the bridge by which the Durhams had crossed to the attack. While the sappers were working on the river, and the Durhams and the 60th on the hill, a party of Boers crept up in the darkness to retake the hill they had

lost. So silent was their advance that they were on top of the British pickets ere being discovered.

A shout, a spattering of rifle shots, a groan, and like a brown torrent the burghers broke past the pickets, and into the half-built sangars. For the moment their rush was irresistible. The Durhams were borne back by the onslaught. Rifles were fired at close quarters, and many a hardy lad fell on Vaal Kop.

But it was not for long. Lyttelton had on the slope below the crest companies of the 60th and the Durhams, for he had not made the mistake of crowding his men at the top. Calling on these, he hurled them with fixed bayonets at the foe.

It was night ; but there was light enough to fight by. Up came the reserves in line ; and, regardless of the fire at close quarters, charged the enemy. The farmers clubbed their guns ; they fired their rifles and their Mauser pistols ; they fought with greatest pluck. But they could not stand the bayonet-charge in line. The Durhams shouted and fell on. They were not thirsty now, nor hungry. The 60th cheered and drove in the steel.

The Dutchmen began to give way. "At them, my lads." And, foot by foot, the infantry drove them back—back from the kopje's height—back along the ridge, following them with biting steel. And at last the pressure became too great. The Dutchmen felt that their attack had failed. They had no time to reform or to load their rifles again. So they broke and fled, leaving many a one of their best and bravest on hill and ridge. And the British returned to their sangar-building.

Lyttelton's men were in a state of the kind in which relief was necessary. They had been on the move since the early morning ; they had marched and fought under a blazing sun ; they had spent several hours hard at work building fortifications on the ground they had conquered. And this with very little to drink and less to eat. So all anxiously awaited the dawn.

CHAPTER LII.

VAAL KRANTZ AND BACK AGAIN.

DAYLIGHT, diamond clear, broke on the Vaal Krantz, blackening still more black the frowning summit of the Zwart Kop, silvering like a precious streak the windingTugela stream. It broke on wakeful pickets and slumbering soldiers bivouacking on the summit and slopes of Vaal Krantz, on the host encamped below in the plain almost encircled by the river, on slouch-hatted farmers roused from light slumbers on Doorn Kloof and Brakfontein. And as the rays of God's own sun shed their light, they whom He had made out of the dust of the earth rose, and, shaking the dew from their tattered raiment, made ready to deface the image and likeness of their Maker.

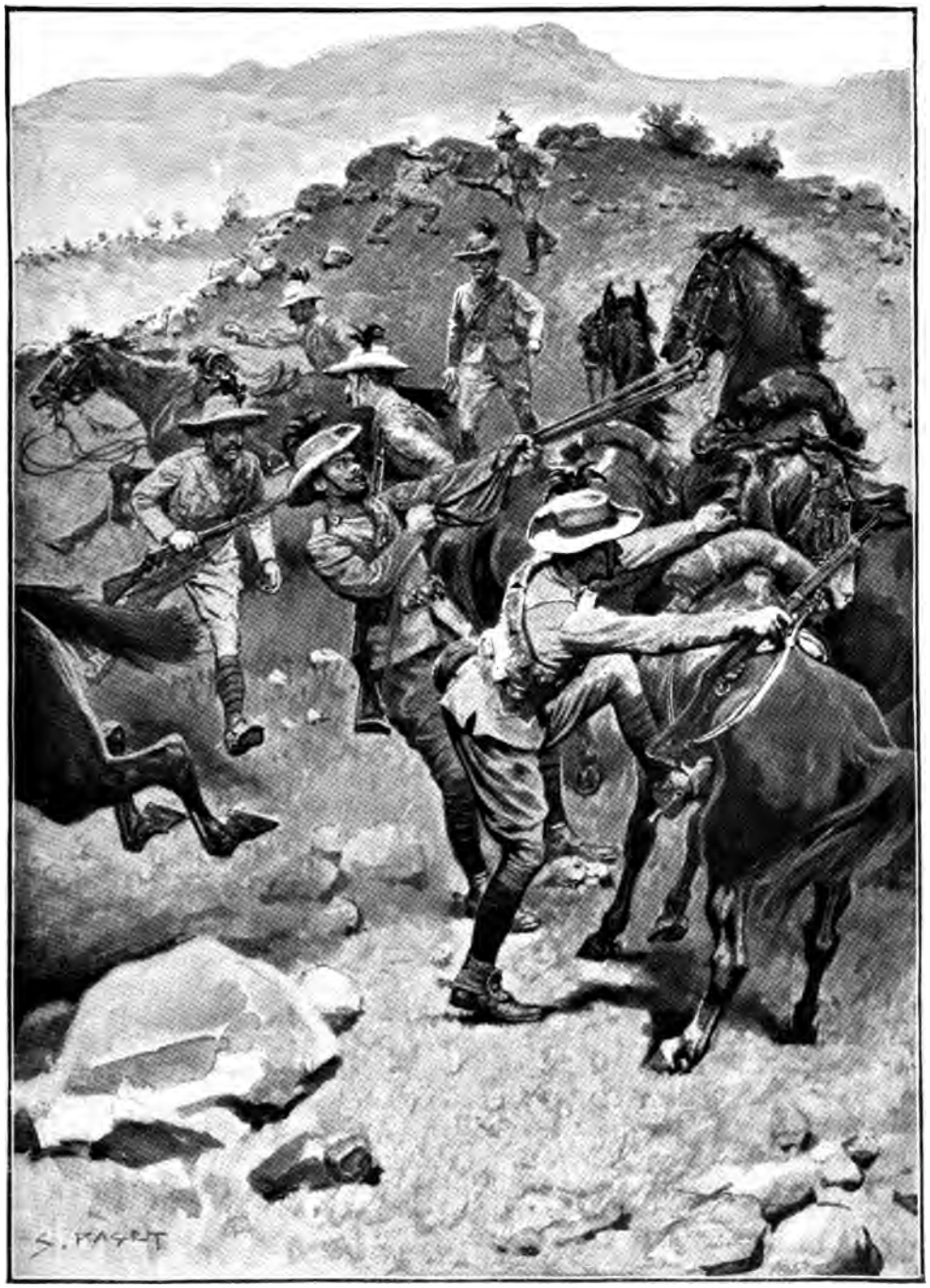
Hardly had the day broken when the clamour of the cannon recommenced. The Boer gunners had taken their 94-pound Creusot from its old position and mounted it upon the very summit of Doorn Kloof, and wasted not a moment in vigorously shelling Lyttelton's Brigade on Vaal Kop. At the same time, from the far end of Vaal Krantz, two pom-poms showered their tiny shells upon the same place, and a 40-pound Krupp gun and several field guns joined in the cannonade.

On the other side there was shelling also—shelling of a most vigorous character, and the Naval 12-pounders were particularly active.

Well was it for the British brigade on Vaal Kop that they had devoted themselves to raising defences. For had they not constructed a complete series of breastworks and sangars they would have been wiped out, so accurate and continuous was the firing. The Boer gunners surpassed themselves, and in the early morning some of them performed a daring feat which elicited the warm admiration of the British artillery.

It was no less than the carriage of a gun across open country in the teeth of a tremendous shelling from the Naval 12-pounders. Evidently the commandant of the Boer artillery thought that he would rake Vaal Kop better if he had a gun on the south-east of it, so he bade some of his men take a team and carry one of the pieces into a donga in front of Doorn Kloof. The orders were obeyed in a fashion that we were unaccustomed to see on the Dutch side. The sturdy Boer cannoneers dragged their heavy piece along the open veldt under the very nose of our guns on Zwart Kop. Shell after shell the naval gunners hove at them. The huge missiles dropped over them and round them, but the dogged Dutchmen, escaping hurt by some miracle, were not to be scared from their task, and manfully disregarding the shrieking shells, they successfully transported their gun across the open country, and finally reached the donga at which they aimed. Arrived here, they lost no time in loading and joining in the cannonade of Lyttelton's brigade.

It had happened twice before, and it



THE S.A.L.H. SURPRISED BY BOERS NEAR DOORN KLOOF.

happened again, that when a position had been carried by storming at some expense by the infantry, it was found to be of little value as a strategical point of vantage. General Buller intended, after capturing Vaal Krantz, to hurl his cavalry at the Boer line a little higher up and break through. But after he had inspected the position won, and from it had surveyed the country ahead, he came to the conclusion that if the infantry was allowed to push along the ridge and capture the whole of Vaal Krantz, the army would still not be in a position either to break through or turn Brakfontein ridge.

The cavalry was drawn up behind Zwart Kop, and waited the whole day expecting every moment orders to dash forward. But the orders never came. The only part of the mounted troops who had any share in the fighting on the 6th (February) were the South African Light Horse and some of the other colonial mounted men. These went out on the low ground to the right in the direction of Doorn Kloof, where they met, occasionally, parties of Boer sharpshooters, hidden more or less skilfully in all sorts of surprising clefts in the ground. With these the Light Horse skirmished plentifully ; sometimes managing to get a patrol on top of them unexpectedly, sometimes being themselves surprised. All the ground here, right up to the point where the Creusot gun was mounted, was country admirably suited to the Boer system of warfare. It abounded in dongas and kloofs and ant-heaps and boulders, all offering cover of the best for riflemen. So that the Free State and Transvaal sharpshooters could lie under cover and take pot-shots at the *rooineks* with perfect safety to themselves—a pastime in which they much delighted.

But, on the whole, the second day of the Vaal Krantz operations was a gunnery day until almost dusk. Enormous quantities of shell, lyddite, and shrapnel were hurled by naval guns and howitzers and field guns upon Spion Kop and Doorn Kloof and the further end of Vaal Krantz. The British artillery did not attempt to damage the Boer riflemen, but confined their efforts to attempts to knock out the big guns. They were partially successful. One of the 4.7's struck fair and full a gun on Spion Kop and blew it, Heaven knows where. The Naval 12-pounders made things uncomfortable for their rivals on Doorn Kloof, but they could not find the Long Tom.

During the day some of the K.R.R. pushed a little farther along the ridge ; but a survey of the position made it clear that to carry the whole of Vaal Krantz would involve a series of bayonet attacks —frontal attacks, too—upon a series of strongly-entrenched positions.

Wherefore Lyttelton's Brigade waited all that day for orders, and General Buller went up to see and perceived the difficulties of the situation.

And at night Hildyard's Brigade crossed the northern pontoon, and marched up to relieve Lyttelton's men. The Durhams had been up there about thirty-six hours, during most of which time they had been lying flat in the dust to escape the Boer fire. They had had little water, and less food ; and if ever troops needed to be relieved, these did.

So they marched down from the position they had won, while the fresh brigade marched up.

The next day was almost a repetition of the last. Tons of shot and shell poured into the captured position ; what time the British naval guns and howitzers cast tons more into Spion Kop and the far end of

of Vaal Krantz and Doorn Kloof. So it went on until late in the afternoon.

Meanwhile the East and West Surreys and the West Yorks were holding the captured end of Vaal Krantz, while the Devons made themselves snug a little way down the slope, so as to be able to go to the assistance of the men at the top, if assistance should be required. The men soon became weary, as hour after hour they laid full length in the dust, with the African sun blazing upon them. But to the shells bursting about them, they paid not the slightest attention.

Photo :] [Evelyn & Co., Aldershot.

MAJOR-GENERAL HILDYARD.

The Dutchmen did not intend to attack until it suited them to do so. On the other hand, they were by no means content to let the British remain in undisturbed possession. As dusk set in, some 700 daring spirits, under whose command no one has been able to discover, set out from their end of the Krantz to drive the rooineks back. An officer, watching through a loophole on Vaal Kop, saw the movement, and speedily communicated the cheering news to the men around him. Never was news received with greater thankfulness. The Surreys and the Tykes pulled themselves together, forgot their roasted, blistered backs, took a pull at the lukewarm water in their bottles, charged their magazines, and peeped anxiously through the loopholes.

The Boers crawled along from stone to stone, the half light screening them as much as the boulders, not firing until they were within 1,000 yards of the point where the British battalions awaited them. As to Hildyard, he ordered his men to reserve their fire until the enemy should be not more than 600 yards away. Then let every man shoot for himself. The Dutchmen came on, and opened the ball. The sangars on Vaal Kop were grimly still and silent. The Dutchmen came on more boldly, firing furiously at the sangars.

At last there was a little fighting. For about sixteen hours the English brigade had been wallowing in the dust, doing little except swear. Now there would be a little fancy shooting. The sangars suddenly awoke. Lee-Metfords answered Mausers and Martinis. For about another hundred yards the assailants struggled on, but there the attack failed. So steady and so true was the fire from the stoneworks that not a Boer of them dared move forward another foot.

The British soldiers were now in high feather. They laughed and jested as they pulled the trigger. Two men at the same sangar nearly came to blows because they both claimed as their own a particular Dutchman upon whom they had both drawn at once. Did these blanky etceteras think they were the only people in the world who knew how to handle a rifle? They should have a taste now which would show them what it was like to attack an entrenched position. Hitherto the English brigade had undergone the

other side of the experience—they had always been attacking hills held by Boers. This time the Boers were attacking a hill held by them. So the Cockney boys and the brawny sons of the West Riding spat leaden death from out their fortifications, shouting rough jest and gibe the while.

To do justice, it must be recorded that the assailants kept up the attack in gallant style. True, they had the support of shell-fire, while Hildyard's brigade had nothing but their rifles. On the other hand, the Englishmen had a superiority in numbers and a fortified position. For three hours or more the Boers bravely attempted to get in. For three hours every Dutchman who moved a yard nearer found himself the centre of a hurricane of bullets. And at last the storming party sullenly retired, pursued by volley after volley from the English soldiers.

The bombardment continued all day with little loss, and although Hildyard managed to hold the position already in his possession without much loss, it was found impossible—or, at least, extremely difficult—to make any further progress by this route. Wherefore Buller decided that he would give it up and try to find another way to Ladysmith.

The Dublin Fusiliers, who had not been actively engaged in the Vaal Krantz operations, tired of inaction, offered to storm Doorn Kloof and capture the 94-pounder. It was an offer characteristic of this battalion, which was now at no more than half strength. Moreover, General Hart promised to proffer their request to General Buller, and offered to lead the assault himself. He did make the offer; but it was not entertained, much to the disappointment of the Dublins.

For Buller had now resolved to withdraw from this part of the field. He had made up his mind that he could not get through on the left of Colenso, owing to the extremely difficult nature of the country. So he decided to return to his original camp at Chieveley, and thence to have a try by the direct road from Colenso. He had a difficult task before him, and the work was harassing in the extreme. Messages came through from Ladysmith that, although they did not despair of being able to hold out, yet the hospital was becoming fuller and the fighting line more thin every day.

At 9 p.m. on the night of the 7th of February, eight days after the preparations had begun for the Vaal Krantz movement, orders came to the brigade on Vaal Kop to retire. The troops did not like it; but orders are orders, and the men had confidence in their general. They knew that retreat did not mean defeat. It only meant that they were going to try another road. By midnight the English brigade was in the valley again. Speedily the whole force on that side withdrew across the pontoon bridges. The sappers got to work again and took the bridges to pieces, and in the early morning the whole force retired to camp.

Warren's division went back to Springfield. The rest retired to Spearman's camp; and immediately the men were set to work to strike camp and march back to the railway line by the same way they had come a month before. Waggons and oxen, mules and horses, guns and men, slowly and sadly wended their way eastward; and on the 11th of February the army of Natal, which on the 10th of January had set out with so much pomp and circumstance, with so much hope and confidence, was once more encamped about the railway line from Chieveley to Frere.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE BATTLE OF PAARDEBERG.

WE left Lord Roberts's force at the point at which it had caught up and intercepted Cronje in his flight to Bloemfontein. You remember that the Cavalry Division had pounced upon him on the north bank of the Modder, just as he was about to cross the stream, and had managed to hold him all day at the drift. And you will remember that the 6th and 9th Divisions, hurrying up from Klip Drift and Jacobsdal, had marched all the day and night of the 17th until they, too, had come up with the enemy.

The 18th of February was a fatal and fateful day. It was a Sunday, and was the eighth day upon which the army had been on the move.

At 3 a.m. the British were astir, the 6th Division being the first to rise from the bivouac. The cavalry set out from their resting-place, which was called Kamelfontein, half an hour later.

The British force was speedily placed in a complete circle round the doomed commandoes of Cronje, and it became a question what should be done. Lord Roberts had ordered that no frontal attack should be made upon a strong position. On the other hand the enemy, after having been chased for three days, being tired and probably hungry, might be supposed to be out of spirits; and under ordinary circumstances it would undoubtedly have been good policy for the pursuing force to attack. Besides this consideration, there was to be taken into account the fact that in all probability other commandoes were on the way to assist Cronje's people; and the rule is rather to attack and overwhelm a force when it is small, than to wait until it becomes larger and more formidable by reinforcements.

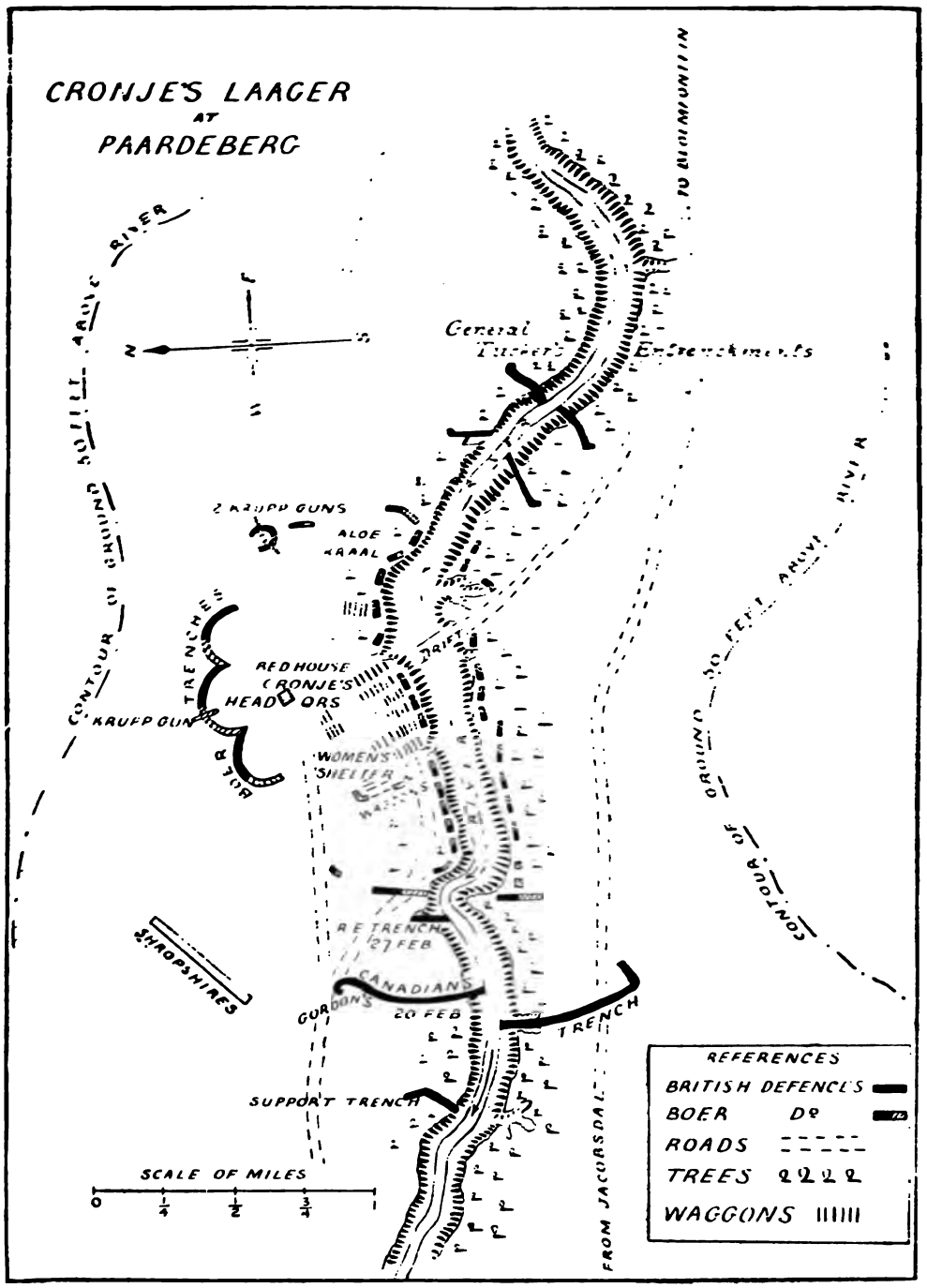
But the Boer was not an ordinary foe. The very constitution of his force, the mere fact that he fought rather as an individual than as an infinitesimal fraction of a body, made it unsafe to apply to him the reasoning that might properly be applied to an army modelled in the usual European fashion. The Boer was so dangerous by reason of his ability to shoot and to make the most of cover, that to force him to fight from behind entrenchments was a most dangerous procedure.

But Kelly-Kenny, with the concurrence of, if not instigated by, Lord Kitchener as chief of staff, resolved to fall upon the Boers and overwhelm them before they should have time to fortify themselves more securely or to receive reinforcements.

Let us now see the disposition of the British forces.

Cronje was in the river bed, and he also held some kopjes on the north and south banks of the river.

Macdonald's brigade (of the 9th Division) was on the west, on the south bank. Smith-Dorrien's brigade, the other half of the 9th Division, was also on the south bank—that is to say, the 9th



MAP OF PAARDEBERG.

Division was pushing Cronje from the direction of Jacobsdal. Kelly-Kenny's division had gone right round to the other side of the Boers, on the south bank, and the whole division was therefore facing Macdonald's brigade and pushing the Boers on that side of the river from the direction of Bloemfontein. On the north bank, opposite Kelly-Kenny, were General French's cavalry and some mounted infantry. Thus Cronje had round him a force largely outnumbering his own, and every avenue of escape was cut off.

All that night and the early morning the Boer general had occupied his men in strengthening his position. And it was an excellent one for defence by rifle-fire. If Cronje chose it deliberately, there is no doubt that he showed great skill and judgment. If, on the other hand, he was forced into it accidentally, he was exceedingly lucky. His men were disposed between Paardeberg Drift and Koodoosrand Drift, where the Modder flows about south-west by west. The river itself is more like a deep railway cutting than like any river-bed one is accustomed to see in Europe. The sandy soil is worn away by the water to the depth of thirty feet, and an average width of about seventy yards. Nature, in her own fashion, has bound the banks together by causing mimosa and willow trees to grow on the banks, from several yards along the top down to the bottom of the sides of the cutting. It need hardly be said that a natural trench of this kind, set with cover such as the shrubs and trees afforded, was an enormous advantage to the fighting Boer general. Add to this the fact that all the length of the stream dongas extend at right angles from the river, also yielding excellent shelter for riflemen.

The character of the ground on the north and south banks differs considerably. On the north bank there is about a thousand yards of almost flat ground, reaching from the river bank to broken ground, which in turn reaches back again to a ridge of high kopjes. Paardeberg itself is one of these kopjes. The south bank is rather more level. There runs here a belt of grassy plain about a mile and a half wide, backed by rising ground, and not far away is a hill christened Kitchener's Hill, which is, in fact, a ring of kopjes.

It will thus be seen that Cronje had possession of a place not difficult to defend against attack. Any troops advancing upon his laager must cross a grassy plain for a distance of 3,000 to 1,000 yards, without the slightest cover of any kind, and exposed to fire, not only from the banks of the river, but also from the transverse dongas. Alternatively, the assailants might try to force a way along the bed of the river. But here they would be confined within a space not more than 100 yards wide at any point, thus giving little or no space for manœuvring, and exposed to rifle fire from men in trenches. For the soft and sandy nature of the soil rendered it only a matter of a few minutes for such skilled labourers as the Dutchmen to construct row after row of entrenchments.

We have been at some pains to describe the country—or, rather, the topography of Cronje's position at Paardeberg—because otherwise it might seem inexplicable, first, that he should attempt to hold it, and second, that he should be able to hold it for ten minutes against the flower of the British army, which outnumbered him ten times.

At four o'clock in the morning battle was joined. Hannay's mounted infantry were the first to come into action. They

were encamped on the far side of the Boers, quite near the river on the south bank, and the Dutchmen began pelting them with rifle fire while they were snatching a hasty breakfast. Hannay had his men out in a very few minutes, and promptly attacked his assailants. Descending into the river bed well above Paardeberg Drift, he discovered that he was opposed by the out-lying pickets of the Boers, entrenched in a series of trenches extending a quarter of a mile or so above Paardeberg Drift. The mounted infantry rode up as near as they could, and then, dismounting, skirmished forward. The Boers were brave and determined, and held on against enormous odds for a long time; but the mounted infantry pressed on, regardless of loss, and, being able to get a little cover occasionally, gradually drove the pickets back, until they had cleared a quarter of a mile of river-bed and swept the pickets back on the main body.

It was 6.55 a.m. before the main British army was really in action. French marched out with bag and baggage from Kamelfontein, and reached his appointed spot just after half-past six. By seven o'clock his guns were in action, shelling the laager and the trenches of the enemy. The naval guns joined in a few minutes later; but, unfortunately, one of them went wrong after firing two or three rounds. Then the field batteries joined in, and soon forty guns were hurling lyddite and shrapnel into the devoted commandoes.

The hill known as Kitchener's Hill was occupied for some time by the mounted infantry. Lord Kitchener saw that this was to all intents and purposes the key of the Boer position. But, owing to some mistake, which was never cleared up, the mounted infantry abandoned this hill early in the day, and a party of Boers from the South—De Wet's party, who had captured the convoy—managed to get possession of it.

It was seven o'clock when the infantry deployed for action. The Highland Brigade was sent to attack across the widest part of the grassy plain on the south bank; and they deployed with the Black Watch in the centre, the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders on the right, and the Seaforths on the left. They were sorry, every one of them, for the hard lot of the Highland Light Infantry—the fourth regiment of the brigade—who had been left to guard communications at Klip Drift.

In touch with the kilted men, Knox's Brigade spread, ready to attack across the same plain. Knox put the West Ridings and the Buffs in the van, with the Oxford Light Infantry and the Gloucesters supporting them, and on the right of Knox was the Yorkshire Regiment of Stephenson's Brigade.

It was a wonderful sight, eight battalions of British infantry deployed for battle on the edge of the grassy plain—every man eager and confident, impatient only for the word of command that was to hurl their serried ranks at the Dutchmen. The Highland Brigade in particular was exceedingly keen. They had not yet wiped out Magersfontein, and were anxious to show the Army and Scotland that their repulse on that fatal morning had not been their own fault.

Hector Macdonald rode along the ranks and here and there jerked out a soldierly word or two in purest Gaelic to his comrades whom he commanded. And when the word came, the Highland Brigade advanced across that open ground in a magnificent loose line, after a fashion that no infantry could have surpassed. They held

their heads high, as became the keepers of the great traditions of their historic brigade. Kilts swished as the men swung forward. No pipes played, but the Mauser bullets from the front screeched weird tunes. Down dropped Seaforth and Sutherlander, but the magnificent line marched calmly and proudly forward, regardless of death and wounds, until the word was given to lie down.

The point which the Highland Brigade was sent to attack was a slight bend in the river ; and all that morning, through the fearful noon-day glare of the afternoon, the three battalions hurled themselves time after time at the trenches.

The battle was very like the battle of Modder River, where Methuen sent his battalions all day at an invisible enemy entrenched in a river bed. If anything, this was a worse position to attack than the other had been. For in the earlier action the Boers had only trenches in the river, while here they had other trenches—namely, the dongas spoken of above—from which they could deliver a raking fire upon the assailants. From one of these dongas a strong party of riflemen commanded the left of the Highland Brigade. Macdonald urged his men forward, and the men responded with every gallantry. They were simply a target for the foe. They had no chance of retaliating unless they could come to rushing distance, and struggle as they would to rushing distance they could not come. Time and time again the line endeavoured to advance. They reached to within 400 yards of the deadly trenches opposite, but beyond this they could not move. They lay down, therefore, and with their mess-tins scraped up tiny mounds of earth, which afforded them a slight protection against bullets. They fired occasionally, and one man of the Seaforths believed he hit a Boer. But it was no light matter to shoot. For, leaving out the fact that not once in an hour could you see anybody to shoot at, as soon as you raised your head from the ground you found yourself the butt at which a hundred rifles aimed. In five seconds ten times as many bullets would kick up the dust all round and in front of you, and as likely as not you would feel a burning pain somewhere about you.

And if you were hit you must make up your mind to lie out on the veldt until nightfall. It was sheer suicide for ambulance bearers to show themselves within range — Red Cross or no Red Cross ; for the Dutchmen were now desperate, and thought as little of the conventions of civilised warfare as they did of the conventions of polite society. They shot at anything and everything. Wherefore any unfortunate wretch who was wounded had to staunch the bleeding as best he could, and bear the pain of his wounds and the burning of the sun as best he might.

And men lay there in that awful heat until they gibbered and raved. Strong men vomited from weariness and the heat, and now and again a madman would break from the ranks and rush towards the river higher up, risking death a hundred times a minute for the chance of a drink of mud and water. Which, if he drank, would almost inevitably give him typhoid fever.

In the afternoon Hector Macdonald, who had freely exposed himself, as his manner was, was struck by a bullet in the foot. It was no new experience for " Fighting Mac " to be wounded. He had left some of his blood in various parts of the world, and had been little the worse for it. But this mishap caused him to curse with great bitterness. He had attained the

summit of his ambition—to command a Highland Brigade. He had found his men disorganised, and just as he had licked them into shape and was beginning to get splendid work out of them, he was hit by one of these wretched Boers.

While the Highlanders were vainly wasting their valour and their blood against the stubborn entrenchments of the Dutchmen, Smith-Dorrien's brigade was struggling across the veldt, trying to strike Paardeberg Drift. The whole four regiments advanced in extended order by rushes, and between 8.30 and 9 a.m. it reached the drift. It seemed to General Colvile, the commander of the 9th Division, that the brigade would be of more use on the north bank, so he ordered the Canadians, the Gordons, and the Shropshires to cross at the drift, while the Cornwalls remained on the south bank to guard that end of the ford.

With great goodwill the three regiments first named dashed into the water, and in such haste were they to reach the other side that many of them tried to cross wide of the ford, and in consequence were obliged to swim for it. But somehow the battalions got over. The Dutchmen in the river bed kept up on them a fire that might have been deadly if the Cornwalls on the south bank had not been there to protect the crossing of their comrades. As it was, one or two kilted men floated dead down the stream, and one or two sons of the Dominion found a watery grave in Africa.

But the three battalions reached the north bank in comparative safety. As for the wading, they minded it not a jot—in fact they rather enjoyed it, for the heat was terrible.

Arrived at the far bank, the task before the men was one of great danger, calling for pluck and determination, as well as skill. It was no less than to clear the bank of the Boers, who were ensconced amongst the bushes and in the transverse dongas. It meant charging an enemy whom you could not see—though you knew him to be close at hand with a rifle levelled at your head. The task was, on the whole, about as lively as that of a man who should be deposited in the midde of a field on a pitch black night and told to find his way out, at the same time being informed that all round were pits and man-traps.

But the Gordons were a crack regiment who prided themselves on being the finest infantry in the world. They were bound to keep up the traditions of the regiment. Not to mention the fact that they would have fought in any case, being Scots and, by heredity, men of war. And the Canadians meant to go wherever the Gordons led. In fact, there was not a man of them who did not hope that the day would bring forth some dangerous bit of service, so that they, the Queen's subjects from beyond the seas, might show the way even to their kilted comrades. And none were keener than the French-speaking company, commanded by Major Pelletier. As for the Shropshires, English lads, they had not the great traditions of the 92nd, nor, on the other hand, had they new colours to enlaurel, like the Canadians, but their limbs and their courage had been made in England, and they would not be backward when the bugle blew.

The three battalions formed on the bank in companies, and then split up into half companies with bayonets fixed. It was about 9.15 a.m. when they formed up, and from that time began some of the fiercest fighting of the day. They plunged into the thick bushes, they rushed across the veldt. Men behind trees, and from

the midst of the scrub, shot at them at point blank range. Rifles seemed to volley from the bowels of the earth. But the three battalions of Smith-Dorrien dashed in with reckless courage. They descended into the dongas, and many they

THE CANADIANS CROSSING THE DRIFT.

slew there. They fought duels from behind mimosa bushes at twenty yards. A few of the Seaforths of Macdonald's brigade had fought their way down to the bank, and they, too, waded and swam the river, and joined the ranks of the Canadians.

Thirty years ago the task of clearing a river bank such as this would have been nothing like so difficult, for the smoke of the powder would have betrayed the lurking places of the defending marksmen. But an enemy firing melinite, which makes no smoke at all, could lie concealed in a bush and pick off a dozen men before the sharpest eye could detect his whereabouts. And many a Boer, climbing a tree, used his rifle for hours without being discovered.

Shouting, cheering, shooting, stabbing, Canadian, Scot, and Englishman fought shoulder to shoulder in that dreadful entanglement. The mimosa and the tough buffalo grass played havoc with the

bare knees of the kilted warriors, but of scratches nobody took notice. For about a mile the British infantry drove the Dutchmen back, foot by foot—themselves losing heavily, as was inevitable in such a conflict.

Then they came to a long and wide donga, strong naturally, and strengthened by art, which they tried in vain to walk over. A double row of Mausers lined the stronghold, which was so placed that the defenders were invisible to anyone five yards away. In vain the Canadians, with a gallantry and fearlessness never surpassed in warfare, charged time and time again at the fortification. Now and then some Briton would penetrate through the lead to within twenty yards or so, only to fall to a score of bullets.

Then the officers called their men off. It was useless to fight in this fashion—merely a waste of brave men's lives. So the three battalions were marched round in a circuit wide of the fringe of bushes and the transverse dongas, and taken to a point a little higher up, where they deployed for battle on the veldt. The Canadians held the centre of the line, the Shropshires the right, and the Gordons the left. They were spread out wide in a double line, with orders to try and rush the Boer laager with the bayonet. The Gordons were now a little out of the running, because space was limited and their battalion was somewhat crowded out. But the Canadians and the Shropshires attacked with fury.

"Advance!" Two battalions rush forward at top speed. Five-and-twenty yards they cover, and then the word comes "Down!" The men throw themselves flat on the earth, and for several minutes answer with their rifles the musketry of the Dutchmen. Then again, "Advance!" Another five-and-twenty yards are covered with a rush, though men fall thick now. And so, alternately rushing and firing, the Englishmen and the Canadians cross three-quarters of the plain which separates them from the laager. They are so close up that at last they are able to bring some effective fire to bear upon the Boers. Some Canadians and Shropshires, all mixed together, reach a point whence they can enfilade a trench, and they shoot with such goodwill that Cronje loses more men here than in any other part of the field.

But it is slow work, and at 3 p.m. the two battalions are no nearer than 800 yards from the enemy. Beyond this they cannot go. It is not that they have no stomach for the fight—they are as full of bravery as ever. But they have been marching and fighting nearly twelve hours, and every time they rise to rush again they seem to be met by a scythe of lead that mows them down.

Colvile sees the state of affairs. He sees that if the laager is to be stormed, fresh troops must join the attack. So he goes down to the Cornwalls at the drift, and orders them to cross and march to where the rest of the brigade is engaged. The Cornish men march steadily down into the water, through it, and over the drift to the north bank; and, making a detour, they arrive in the rear of the Canadians and the Shropshires at 3.30 p.m.

Now comes, perhaps, the finest charge of the day. The Cornwalls march in loose order straight across the plain towards the river. They pass through the ranks of the Shropshires and the Canadians, and then their colonel gives the word, "Double!" The hardy Cornish men shout and dash on. Some Canadians and Shropshires, springing to their feet as the

Cornwalls dash between their files, join the line, and, cheering, charge with them.

So impetuous is the rush that the line covers nearly a quarter of a mile in face of a terrible fire; and so they come to within 400 yards, when gallant Aldworth, the colonel of the Cornwalls, charging at the head of his regiment, falls shot near the heart. By a supreme effort, he raises himself on his elbow and cries hoarsely: "Go on, men, and finish it!" And at that moment he is hit in the forehead and so dies. Then the regiment, deprived of its head, checks; and in that moment the impetus of the charge is lost.

The Cornwalls, however, do not retreat. They lie down on the open ground, scraping up with their fingers and their mess tins little heaps of sand, and, with these as cover, carry on a deadly duel with the foe at easy range. It is a dear assault for Smith-Dorrien's brigade. Many a mother in Quebec, many a wife in Penzance, will mourn her nearest and her dearest. The brigade had been set the task of carrying, by frontal attack, a strong position. That the position was not taken is no wonder. For the wonder is only that the assault was ever made.

Let us now look at the other parts of the field, where Kelly-Kenny's division and the mounted infantry were engaged.

Hannay and his mounted men had been ordered to hold a kopje to the south-east —which kopje was considered to be the key of Cronje's position. They held it until within about an hour of noon; and then, through some mistake, they left this post, descended to the river, and crossed to the north bank. They, too, had to face a sustained rifle fire; but they pressed along the bank, now charging on horseback, now dismounting and skirmishing forward on foot, in gallant style.

Hannay led his men desperately. Finding himself confronted by the enemy's laager, in front of which at this point ran a well-defended series of trenches, he adopted the extraordinary course of charging his men on horseback at the trenches. It may have been brave. It was certainly reckless. Colonel Hannay himself paid the penalty, for he was shot early in the afternoon. He was never seen again. Under new leaders the same policy was pursued—charge after charge, magnificent but unwarlike, was hurled at the strong and well-defended position.

Not a man attained within fifty yards of the enemy—as how could anyone cross that belt of fire alive. The reckless desperation of the assault might have carried the mounted infantry through had the Boers been one whit less brave, one whit less determined, or commanded by a general one shade less grim than Fighting Cronje. But the Dutchmen fought like men. They held their rifles steadily and wasted few cartridges; and after charging time after time, only to leave more bodies on the plain, the mounted infantry had to cease from trying to capture the position by the bayonet.

Kelly-Kenny's division had no better fortune—they, too, could get so far and no farther. Early in the morning, Knox's Brigade and the Yorkshire Regiment wended their way down to the river bank, and there, lying down, engaged in a rifle duel all the afternoon against the Boers in the trenches.

It was an unequal contest; for though the British had an enormous advantage in numbers, they were as lambs led to the slaughter. Not a man raised his head to take aim but a bullet went through it or spattered so near in front as to throw the sand up in his face. The Boers, on

the other hand, had plenty of shelter in the dongas and the trenches of the river bank. Knox's men took their punishment bravely enough ; but it was a cruel as well as a senseless thing to lead them into a position like this, where they afforded an easy mark, but could not retaliate.

Knox was shot in the shoulder—the second brigadier to be wounded in the fight.

Stephenson's brigade, the other half of Kelly-Kenny's Division, was at the end of the field opposite to the end where the Highland Brigade was operating. They came the nearest, perhaps, of anyone to accomplish the storming of the laager. First the Essex Regiment and the Welsh Regiment rushed over the veldt with incredible speed and ferocity, and cleared their part of the bank.

Then part of them crossed, so that half of each battalion was on each bank, and at about 1 p.m. they began pushing up towards the centre of the Boer position in a series of short, fierce rushes. The Welshmen fought magnificently. Their fiery Celtic blood was up. They had had no opportunity hitherto of showing the Army how the Cymry could fight ; and, let it be said, they made the most of the chance.

Supported by the Essex men, they cleared the banks for more than a mile. Their method of fighting was to crawl through the bushes until they saw Boers ahead. Then they continued to crawl until within a few yards. Then up and in with the bayonet.

For two hours the fiery Celts swept up the river banks like a whirlwind. Every Dutchman who did not use his heels was pierced through and through ; and at about three o'clock in the afternoon the Welshmen and their comrades had actually cleared out every single Boer between themselves and the laager. All except one trench full—for several hundred riflemen lined a deep and well-constructed trench immediately in front of the Boer waggons.

Lying down for a short time to recover breath, the infantry poured volley after volley into the trench and the laager ; and then, with bayonets fixed, they shouted a British shout and charged. Useless valour ! There met them from trench and laager a perfect storm of lead. Down they went, Welshmen and East Saxon. Officers were slain leading on their companies. It was evident there must be more preparation ere another charge should be made.

So again the men lay down, this time all mixed up together, no companies, no sections, no order, and for an hour they spat lead viciously at the foe in front.

And five-and-twenty men of the Principality did a daring deed. They thought to take the laager by themselves. They crept to within 400 yards of it and charged with fixed bayonets. The boldness of the rush almost carried them through. One hundred yards they covered and then blasting volleys met them. They were twenty, then ten—the ten struggled on. More lead struck them in face and chest and limbs. Only one man is left upright, and he, after lying all by himself firing until he has no cartridge left, crawls back over the dead bodies of his comrades to join the battalion.

Time after time the Welshmen and the men of Essex dash forward up the river bed. Time after time their ranks are withered by the lightning volleys of the Dutchmen, until darkness closes in, with the laager still intact and the British ministering to their wounded.

Early in the morning scouts who had

THE CORNWALLS ON THE RIVER BANK.

been out on the south-east brought word that a party of Boers, numbering not less than 500, were marching towards the scene of action. That was one reason why Hannay's mounted infantry were told to hold the kopje before alluded to.

In addition the British commander sent three companies of the Gloucesters to a hill (called afterwards "Kitchener's Hill") to shoulder the reinforcements off. With the Gloucesters were sent a few of the newly-raised irregulars, Kitchener's Horse.

The operations here were of slight importance, and would have been too insignificant to chronicle but for a lamentable disaster that befell late in the day.

The Boer reinforcements came on, carefully scouting ahead as was their wont, and soon they discovered that the hill ahead of them was held by the British. They came on in skirmishing order, however, and got within rifle-shot. But when they found the strength of our men they sheered off, not caring to attack the kopje.

The British, both men and officers, saw the Dutchmen waver, saw them "files about" and trot off on their shaggy ponies, and drew the inference that the officer leading the commando had seen how hopeless was Cronje's case, and had gone back to wherever he came from by the road he had come by

Little did the Briton know the courage or cunning of the South African Boer. The commando, far from retreating, had merely retired out of range, and had hidden themselves, men and horses, until some plan should appear by which they could make themselves master of one of the kopjes. This done, they expected to be able to open up for their fighting general a line of retreat along which he might escape from the toils in which he found himself.

But the British were completely deceived. They reported that the reinforcements had fled, and thereupon the Gloucesters were ordered down from the hill to take their place in their brigade. And the mounted infantry, as we have told already, left their hill without orders, or, rather, by a mistake in the interpretation of orders. Meanwhile Kitchener's Horse, split up into parties of about fifty men and officers, patrolled the country round.

One such patrol, to the number of forty five, in the course of their scouting came upon a farm, known as Osfontein. Here they saw a man in khaki, who, being questioned, said that the hills around were all held by the English, with plenty of guns, and that the Boers who had been in the neighbourhood had cleared right out.

Now the horses were tired. So were the men. And there was doubtless fodder for the one and food for the other to be found in the low-roofed buildings. At all events there was shade and water, and no one who has not experienced the heat and drought of an African noontide knows what shade and water mean there. Wherefore the officer in charge spoke the welcome words, "Dismount! Off-saddle!"

In a trice the troopers were on the ground, and the very chargers seemed to sigh with relief. Every man led his horse into the spacious outbuildings and foraged for corn, and took off the saddle; and, after cooling the heated beast by walking it gently up and down, gave it water. Then, leaving the horses calmly munching such young green mealies and such corn as could be found, the men strode into the farmhouse and stretched themselves luxuriously on the chairs there. They found food and drink, and were just beginning to enjoy it and their rest as

only hungry, parched and tired men can, when the door burst open.

"The Boers are on us!" And on the heels of the terrified herald of disaster there appeared score upon score of slouch-hatted burghers, every man with rifle to shoulder

Half a dozen shots were heard outside. Then a terrible scuffling and neighing and snorting. The Dutchmen had fired upon the horses, frightened and stampeded them.

The troopers in the farmhouse were not to be captured without a struggle. They had left their rifles outside, else they might have held the building for a week. They rushed upon the foemen who stood at the door, and by sheer impetuosity broke through. But there was a strong cordon drawn just round the house. The rifles had all been captured. And the troopers, defenceless, found themselves looking down the threatening muzzles of a row of Mausers and Martinis held by steady hands. Still they tried to rush through —a desperate resolve. For a dozen were shot down on the instant; and the rest, seeing how hopeless was their situation, surrendered at discretion.

Out of the forty-five, only two returned to the British camp. One of these had not been in the house at all, and the other was Lieutenant Watermeyer.

The lieutenant had a narrow squeak. He had left his horse tethered at the back of the house, apart from the rest; and when the alarm was given he rushed to the spot. He reached it in safety, untethered the charger, gathered the reins in his hand—when a Boer came round the corner of the house.

Crack! It is the spit of the Mauser. The Dutchman can hardly miss at that distance, surely. The bullet grazes Watermeyer's cheek, leaving a scar as of a hot iron drawn across the skin. The lieutenant drops the reins, brings rifle to shoulder, and the Boer is a dead man. But the horse, alarmed by the firing and the whistling of the Mauser bullet past his nose, has bolted. More Boers appear. The lieutenant does not pause: it is one of the times when for good or ill the mind must be made up in a moment. He bolts to the wall, clambers over as bullets strike the stones and scream past his head.

It has been said that a dismounted cavalryman is bound to be brave—he cannot run away, because his spurs will not let him. Watermeyer, of Kitchener's Horse, will go bail that a man with spurs can run 200 yards in about twenty seconds —under certain circumstances. Thanks to his speed, his luck, and his presence of mind, the lieutenant reached the camp: to report to his chiefs another story of British troops captured from want of taking the simplest precautions.

And the Dutchmen, having made their "bag," proceeded to rejoin the rest of the commando, which hastened to the top of the kopje where the mounted infantry had been, and occupied it. They were a real menace to the success of the British plans: for the position held by them was a strong one, and it would not be difficult for other reinforcements to join them there—in which case Cronje would stand an excellent chance of breaking away under the protecting fire of his friends.

To review the situation: The day of the battle of Paardeberg had not been one of which the Army, and especially the leaders, could be proud. The troops had fought bravely enough, but they had been set to perform a task almost impossible—to attack without cover, and, frontally, a position of enormous strength. It was Modder River over again, but with even

less excuse. For General Kelly-Kenny and Lord Kitchener had at least Lord Methuen's heavy losses that day as a warning.

Twelve hundred men in killed, wounded, and missing the British lost that day—a loss greater than the total of all the rest of the casualties between Modder River camp and Bloemfontein. Truly, our brave generals had not distinguished themselves in this affair.

And the Boers, what of them?

Their sufferings had been terrible, their losses great, though not half so great as ours. For about twelve hours lyddite fell into the laager, shrapnel burst over the trenches. Waggons took fire and blazed luridly. The horrid fumes of the lyddite turned everything a sickly green. Horses were killed in hundreds by the shelling.

Nor did the men escape altogether. The steel of the Welshmen, the rifles of the Canadians, the musketry of the Highland Brigade left many a gap in the commandoes.

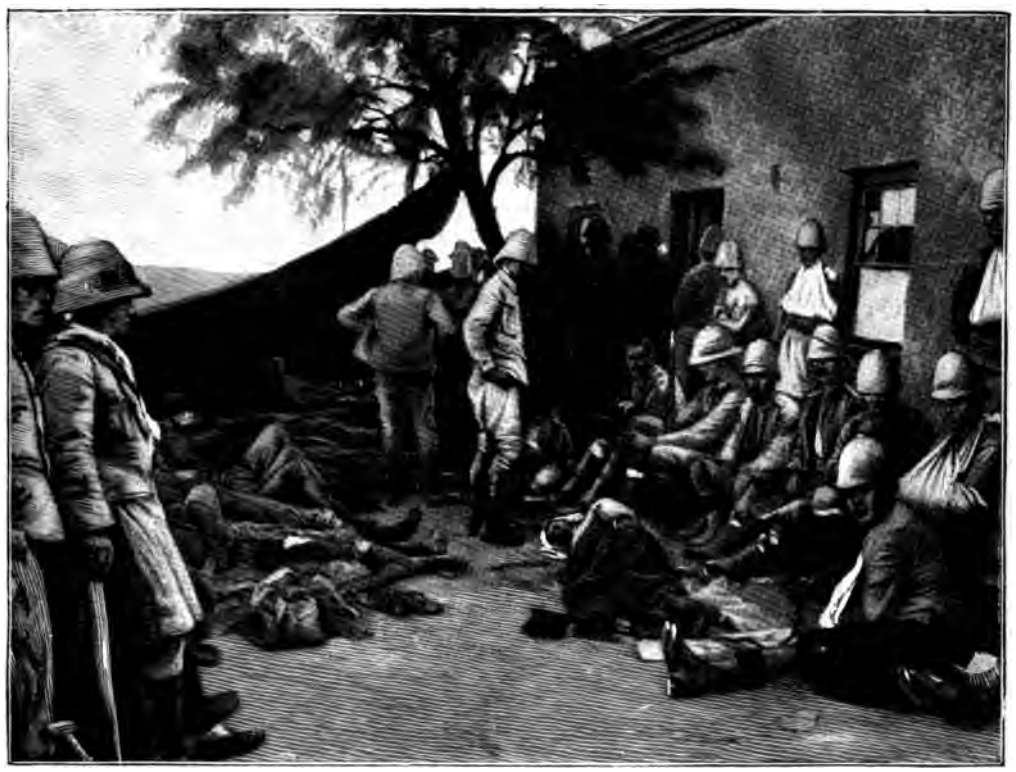
And all day Cronje sat in his laager, holding the hand of his wife—fit helpmeet for the Fighting General. Grim, inflexible, sometimes he issued an order; but in the Boer army few orders were necessary. There he sat and pondered, his beard on his broad chest. Did he, one wonders, realise that the end was coming?

In peaceful English villages hymns rose to Heaven. "Abide with me, O Lord, with me abide." The British soldiers by Modder's bank threw themselves on the ground, all caked with blood and sweat. "When other helpers fail and comforts flee." "Here, doctor, I think this one still lives."

And with hymn and psalm and anthem there rose to the throne of the Most Highest the moans of the dying, the groans of the wounded.

And Cronje sat in his laager. "Surely," he said, "the Lord hath deserted me."

A TYPICAL CATTLE FARM.



WOUNDED AT PAARDEBERG WAITING FOR THR DOCTOR.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE WEEK IN THE LAAGER.

IT was quite possible that Cronje would attempt, under cover of the darkness, to break out of the river bed and burst away through the force encircling him. There were those who had thought that if the stubborn Dutchman could have been persuaded to leave his cannon and his waggons and stores, as well as his wounded, behind, he might even then, with the assistance of the 500 men who held the kopje to the south-east, have escaped with practically all his force.

But Cronje refused to do this. It is not for anyone to guess what he had in his mind. He must have known by this time that the force surrounding him was enormously superior in numbers to his own, and, indeed, to any army that the Republics could put in the field. He must have known, too, that in artillery he was hopelessly over-weighted. And one can only account for his attitude of "sit-down" by supposing that he had confidence in the ability of the Republics to send out a sufficient force to keep the British in check while he should be getting away with all

his impedimenta. Besides, Cronje despised the British soldiery, and thought nothing of their commanders.

So the stout old warrior kept up heart. Some there were amongst the burghers who would have surrendered to the British, but Piet Cronje would listen to no counsel of that kind. He declared that he would fight until he died, and such was his power over the men whom he led that they were absolutely afraid to propose surrender to him afterwards. But in this army, as in most others, there were some who were craven, and they did not hesitate to save their own skins.

The British infantry bivouacked where they had fought, but there were some poor wretches who were obliged to do picket duty. On the north side of the river, French's cavalry, which had not taken any very active part in the proceedings of Sunday, the 18th, performed the duty of the watch-dog. But their vigilance had to be directed rather to prevent anyone breaking out than anyone breaking in. On the south bank and in the bed of the river, east and west of the Boer laager, a strong line of pickets kept watch and ward. All night you might have heard the words of challenge, "Who goes there? —who goes there?" And weird figures advanced out of the darkness, holding up their hands, to be halted by the sentries and kept standing, under the cover of a levelled rifle and a fixed bayonet, until assistance should come to convey them to the rear.

These prisoners were Dutchmen who had no more stomach for the fight. They had crawled out of the laager in the darkness to surrender. And they cursed Cronje aloud. They reviled him as a stupid, obstinate, inhuman man, who cared nothing for the sufferings or the lives of his soldiers.

At dawn the next day there appeared, coming from the river bed, a ragged man bearing a white flag. Could it be that the fighting Dutchman had thought better of his resolve, and had determined to surrender? The envoy approached and demanded to be taken to the British general, for whom, he said, he had a letter from his commandant. The messenger was promptly taken to Lord Kitchener and General Kelly-Kenny, and it then appeared that the proposal of the Boer general was for an armistice of twenty-four hours for the purpose of burying his dead.

Lord Kitchener replied that it was impossible to accede to the request, which must await the arrival of the commander-in-chief. Meanwhile the guns which had already started shelling the laager were ordered to be silent. Lord Kitchener further stated that Lord Roberts was expected momentarily.

On Sunday night the chief of staff had sent a message to his commander, telling him that he held Cronje with his whole force surrounded in the bed of the Modder; that he had attacked him, and had been fighting him all day; and that he proposed to resume the attack on the morrow.

The message reached Lord Roberts early on the morning of the 19th. He had already sent from Jacobsdal the 7th (Tucker's) Division, with orders to push on along the Modder, so as to catch up to the other two divisions. But when the commander-in-chief heard of the attack on Cronje, with just enough of detail to be aware what sort of an attack it was, he called for his horse and told the staff to mount and ride with him.

With stern, set face he turned eastward. Mile after mile through the blazing heat, over the sand, that white-haired man, whose first service had been forty-four

years before, rode without a halt. His staff and his body-guard, younger men than he by a whole generation, panted behind him. One or two went giddy with the heat and had to fall out. But the Little Man trotted straight ahead. Thirty-five miles without drawing rein rode Roberts of Kandahar, until he reached Koodoosrand Drift, where Macdonald lay wounded in a tent and Kelly-Kenny and Kitchener discussed further plans of attack.

With the eye of a born soldier, trained by years of hard study and many a tough campaign, the commander-in-chief saw the truth of the situation. He saw that his brave men had been thrown away by being hurled against the strong position, unprotected from a fire which must have been terrible. To the authors of the attack he administered a rebuke all the more crushing since it proceeded from one so gentle as the soldiers' "Bobs."

"The Machine" had no further opportunity of trying to capture Cronje; for Lord Roberts himself took command, and Lord Kitchener went to Prieska, where he occupied his energy and his talent in subjugating rebels.

The proposal for the armistice was at once submitted to the commander-in-chief; and he promptly refused it. Cronje complained bitterly of this; but it must not be forgotten that his whole game was delay. The bombardment was resumed.

But Roberts of Kandahar was as humane a man as ever led an army. He heard from the prisoners that there were in the Dutch laager women and children, and he sent in a message that these might leave, as well as the sick. At the same time he pointed out to his opponent that the Boer position was surrounded and untenable. "Under the circumstances," wrote Lord Roberts, "there could be no dishonour to you in surrendering, and I advise you to surrender." Two hours were given to the Boer general in which to consider this offer. A reply came in the Taal,* which was translated into English for Lord Roberts thus: "There is nothing for me but do as you wish." It will be observed that if you put a comma after "me," the message reads quite differently from the message without punctuation. Lord Roberts understood it to mean: "I have no resource except to follow your wishes," which is the meaning if there is no comma after "me." Accordingly he sent a return note, asking Cronje to come out and give up his sword. To the surprise of the English, however, Cronje replied that he had no intention of surrendering, and never had any such intention. He meant his message to be read: "There is nothing for me in your proposals, but do as you wish"—that is, he meant his message to be one defying Lord Roberts to do his worst.

Wherefore the bombardment was again resumed, and this time more fiercely and more heavily, for Lord Roberts had ordered the guns of the 7th Division to be pushed forward by forced marches ahead of the rest of the army; and French's horse artillery, which had hitherto done very little in the bombardment, joined. So that on Monday evening the Boer laager was one blazing, screeching inferno, as from all quarters, from howitzers and 4·7's, from horse guns and naval 12-pounders, from machine guns and the 15-pounders of the field batteries, lyddite, shrapnel, and streams of bullets flew into and over the devoted Dutchmen. Inside, the camp was

* *Taal* is the variety of the Dutch tongue spoken by the South African Dutch. It is sometimes called "Kitchen Dutch," to distinguish it from the pure or "High" Dutch spoken in Holland.

a sickening sight. Men of all ages, from lads of sixteen to grey-beards of seventy, crouched in dug-out shelters and the holes worn in the sand by the swirl of the stream. Horses and oxen, dead and wounded, lay in heaps. Women, some with children in their arms, tried to look fearless as the huge shells of the 4·7's screamed through the air and dropped, bursting with enormous violence, and turning everything within fifty yards greeny-yellow. Burghers fell down, overcome by the fumes, and had to be brought round by copious doses of vinegar. So terrible was the shell fire that no one dared come out of his shelter to get food. And every now and then a shell would fall on a waggon, scattering the precious food to the four winds and setting the wood alight.

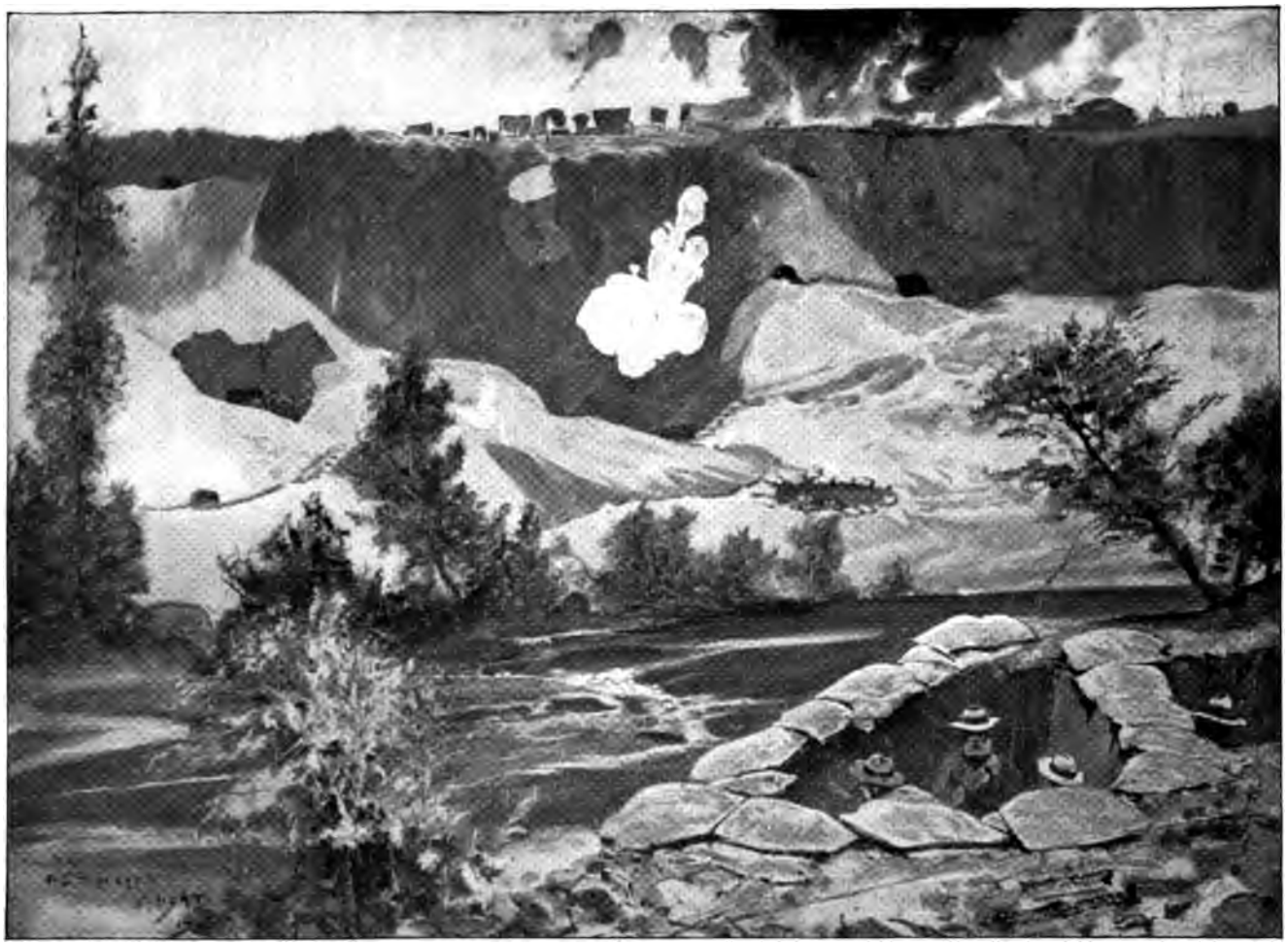
Tucker's division, having marched the thirty-five miles in a day and a half, came up with the rest of the army on the night of the 19th; and so numerous were the burning waggons of the Dutchmen that the 7th Division mistook the glare for the camp fires of the 6th Division. And, thinking that they were near their friends, they bivouacked most dangerously near to the rifles of Cronje's marksmen.

The next morning Lord Roberts was early afield. He took with him a considerable force and reconnoitred the whole position. Time was of some importance to him, because he had very little food, and would have no means of procuring more until he struck the railway again at Bloemfontein. Therefore, if he could have assaulted the Boer position with any reasonable chance of carrying it at slight expense he must do so. Besides, the sooner he could obtain the surrender of Cronje's army, the more supplies of theirs he would capture; and supplies of food were the greatest need of the army at that time.

But, after a careful reconnaissance, the commander-in-chief came to the conclusion that his adversary's position was so strong that to carry it must necessarily involve enormous sacrifices of life. Therefore, although time was precious, he resolved to starve Cronje out rather than attack him. To expedite matters, however, every single piece of artillery that could be brought to bear was to be concentrated upon the laager. And my Lord Roberts believed with the Iron Duke that the only way to get things done properly is to do them yourself. So, with all the craft of an old artillery officer, he personally superintended the placing of the British guns round the enemy's position.

At a range of 2,000 yards on the south bank, immediately opposite the laager, he placed the 18th, 62nd, and 75th field batteries, with two Naval 12-pounders; and on the other side of the river the 65th howitzer battery, the 76th, 81st, and 82nd field batteries, and three 4·7's. The guns on this side were situated in a favourable position, near a bend, so that instead of firing sideways, they were lengthwise—that is, shooting up the river, not merely dropping shells over the bank. Never before had the fire of so many guns been concentrated upon so small an area

But although Lord Roberts declined to attack the laager, he intended to make sure that the Boers there should not escape him. Therefore, he determined to clear out the 500 Boers who held the kopje on the south-east; so he sent the Yorkshires, the Gloucestershires, and the Buffs to clear them out. The Yorkshires and Gloucesters were sent to scale the hill in the front, while the Buffs made a march round in order to attack in the flank. At the same time French was required to co-operate, which he did by



CRONJE'S LAST POSITION: THE HOLES IN THE RIVER BANK.

sending Gordon with the 9th and 16th Lancers and some horse guns to attack from the north. But there was very little fighting. As soon as the Dutchmen saw clearly the dispositions made by the British, and their scouts reported that a battalion was on the move to get round to the other side of them, they perceived that unless they made off while there was still an opening, they would be surrounded by an overwhelming force, and must ultimately surrender. So they retired from the kopjes, saddled their horses, and made off with all speed. And they would have got away with practically no punishment if it had not been for the bold action of a subaltern of Kitchener's Horse. This enterprising young officer was in charge of a patrol of some forty men, when he saw the enemy's commando trooping down in close order from the hill. He immediately galloped his men to a point within about 400 yards of where the Boers must pass. And he did it skilfully, taking advantage of the ground in such a fashion that he would not be discovered by the keen eyes of the adversary.

"Dismount," said the young lieutenant. "Lie low. Nobody move an eyelid until I give the word. Then let 'em have a volley all together. Everybody must mark his man." The hardy warriors of Kitchener's Horse saw how promising was the scheme. They hid their horses and lay down in a nice, sheltered spot, with magazines charged. The men hardly dared to breathe for fear the Boers should hear them. Across the veldt the Dutchmen trotted calmly, for they thought that they had now put themselves out of danger.

Suddenly on the right of them a whistle blew, and on the instant a volley rang out with one single crack. It was easy shooting, for the range was not more than 400 yards, and the Boers were in a mass. Twenty saddles were emptied, twenty more riders reeled. Then another startling crack, and again the commando found itself thinned. With haste, yet coolly, the burghers dismounted, picked up their dead and wounded, and galloped off, pursued by yet another volley from the exultant patrol. The incident gave Kitchener's Horse something to swagger about. Two days before, and the regiment was little pleased with itself, by reason of the affair at Osfontein Farm. But this redressed the balance, with a little in hand to the credit of the British. The young subaltern, whose name was Edwards, received the congratulations of the Silent Cavalryman and of "Bobs" himself. It was something to be proud of, as a first exploit, for Edwards and his patrol had taken heavy toll of the enemy.

The whole of the commando which had evacuated the kopje might have been captured if it had not been for the tired horses of the Cavalry Division. Not only were the animals knocked up with the hard work of the previous ten days, but they were half starved. As for the men of the division, they were also in a parlous state from lack of food. The previous Thursday, when they set out for their final march on Kimberley, they had taken with them in their haversacks three days' rations. And let it be said that three days' rations could all be consumed by a hungry man in two days, without making him feel over-fed.

It was now Tuesday; and since Saturday night the troopers who had marched out from Kimberley in pursuit of the flying Boers had subsisted on fresh air for the most part. The Silent General was no better off than any trooper. His meal on

Sunday consisted of such crumbs of biscuit as he could scrape out of his haversack. On Monday the men had to adopt the practice of sailors cast adrift—that is, to take in a hole in their belts. In fact, it was not until Tuesday, pretty late in the day, that food and forage arrived for the men and horses of the Cavalry Division.

It should be understood that Lord Roberts was laying siege to Cronje's position. Engineers and soldiers were sapping up towards the laager—that is to say, digging trenches in such a manner as to draw closer and closer to the besieged position.

All Tuesday (20th), and far into the night, the British guns bombarded the laager, and here and there a waggon caught fire, sometimes followed by a tremendous explosion if the shell happened to hit any ammunition. Still Cronje sat grim and determined. But at night more burghers sneaked out of the river bed and delivered themselves and their arms over to the British sentries.

To do the other Dutch commandants justice, they had not deserted Cronje. There was a commando of some 1,500 men, which came up to a place called Damfontein, and there took up position on some kopjes. French was ordered to take some of his cavalry and horse artillery to clear these hills, so as to enable the British infantry to draw a complete circle round the Boers in the river bed

French took with him (on Wednesday, February 21st) about 250 men and two batteries, as a kind of reconnaissance in force. He had no idea that the enemy were in considerable strength, and expected by means of his small column to be able to clear all the hills south of the river. But he went forward himself to reconnoitre, and found that he would not be able to cope with the strength he saw before him. Wherefore he immediately sent back to Broadwood, telling him to bring his whole brigade.

The brigade came quickly, and French promptly opened the battle. He ordered up the horse guns to shell the main position, while he sent the cavalry round to the east to turn the Boer flank, and, if possible, to get to the enemy's rear. But as soon as the Dutchmen perceived that they were likely to be surrounded they retreated at full speed, leaving a strong rearguard of about 600 to delay the British. This rearguard galloped into the open and offered battle, and then some of the British cavalry had a very narrow escape of going to join the 18th Hussars at Pretoria.

A squadron of Household troops, seeing a large party of men in felt hats cantering towards them in fairly good order, came to the conclusion that these must be some of our own Colonial troops. For the British irregulars all wore headgear of the same kind as that affected by the Dutchmen. So the gentlemen of the Household Cavalry cantered forward to inquire where the enemy might be. The Boers let them come on until they were within some 200 yards. Then up went their rifles, and a volley crashed out. But for once in a way the Boers had been too "slim." Two hundred yards was a very good charging distance, and when the British perceived the rifles going up, instead of wheeling about and galloping away, they dug in the spur and charged at full speed.

As a wave from the Atlantic dashes into a stranded ship, hurls it backward and breaks it into fragments, so the Household Cavalry dashed into and broke up the commando. Sabres flashed as the heavy chargers of the Englishmen crashed into

ON THE ROAD BETWEEN PAARDEBERG AND JACOBSDAL.

the weedy ponies of the Free Staters. Down went horse and man. For once there was some sword play, as the heavy weapons of the British, wielded by powerful arms, clove through skull and collar bone, and lopped the limbs of the Boers as a woodman cleaves a little sapling with his axe.

Bloody work it was for five minutes. Then the Dutchmen wheeled their ponies round and rode for their lives. It was lucky for them that the Household men's chargers were so weary and ill-conditioned that they could with difficulty trot. Had the Englishmen's horses been in anything like fair condition hardly a Boer could have escaped. For the weedy ponies rolled over under the impetus of the shock of the heavy chargers.

To give the Dutchmen their due, they were no cowards; and as soon as they saw themselves safe from pursuit they halted and made it exceedingly hot for their enemies. But more British came up and rode straight at the enemy, and so successful were their tactics that forty-five Boers were overthrown and made prisoners and fifty left dead on the field. The rest retreated and joined the main commando, which was now streaming away in the direction of Petrusburg.

Again French missed a decisive victory purely by reason of the tiredness of his horses. He did follow up the enemy until horse after horse dropped dead or exhausted on the veldt. Then slowly and sadly the Silent Cavalryman retired. His guns continued to shell the enemy so long as they could reach them, and, on the whole, the Boers must have had a very bad day.

Cronje was now completely isolated. He had not a single friend in sight. The British infantry drew a ring round him, and into the middle of that ring the British guns dropped shells uninterruptedly. The river bed became Gehenna, and to add to the discomforture of the Fighting General, Smith-Dorrien's brigade of infantry got astride of the river on the west and began pushing up slowly but surely towards him.

This time there was no rushing or throwing the men headlong at the Boer defences. Instead the Canadians and the Shropshire Regiment, with many a willing sapper, dug trenches nearer and nearer to the laager. And from these trenches they began to pour an enfilading rifle fire far more deadly than the shells of the big guns.

On Thursday, the fifth day of the bombardment, there was no incident of special importance, save that Smith-Dorrien's brigade pushed a little nearer in the night-time, and two powder waggons in the laager were blown up with lyddite shells. The position of the Fighting General was getting desperate, and long and anxious were the consultations he held with his officers. He himself was rather in favour of attempting to slip away in comparatively small parties by night; and he thought that he could do this by leading his men down the bed of the river. He also hoped for assistance. He would not hear of surrender.

When Friday dawned, the increasing ferocity of the fire from the westward showed him that the hated *rooinecks* had drawn closer to him in the night. But when the sun rose, the flash of a heliograph told him that Commandant Botha was at hand with 3,000 men, who had posted straight from Ladysmith. They had heard of the plight of their comrades. They had heard that Roberts, with an army like a great brown cloud, had crossed the

Orange and was on the march to Bloemfontein. Wherefore some 3,000 Free Staters, anxious rather for the safety of their own country than for the conduct of the campaign as a whole, had resolved to leave Natal to take care of itself and to march to the defence of the Fatherland.

They determined to attack and obtain possession of some of the kopjes to the east, on the south bank of the river, and from it to make that side so hot that Lord Roberts would be obliged to withdraw so much of his circle. Through the gap so made the Fighting General and his force could rush.

The hill they determined to capture was Kitchener's Hill, which was held by the Yorkshire Regiment. The whole of the Boer force did not attack. Instead, they sent on a party of about 700 to take the hill, the rest of the commando remaining behind ready to march forward as soon as the position should be captured.

They reached Kitchener's Hill with little interruption, and promptly proceeded to swarm up it. But the Yorkshire men saw them, and, being in a position easy of defence, took plenty of cover and opened fire. Lord Roberts was soon on the scene. "The Buffs round to the right. Fall on their flank and give them a lesson."

With a determination born of despair, the burghers advanced up the slope of Kitchener's Hill, dodging from boulder to boulder, creeping round mounds and sudden rises, and so advancing to the storm. But the Yorkshire regiment was on its metal, and there was some high-class shooting. And the Buffs, anxious not to miss their share of what was going, set off at a lively pace round the base of the hill and to the other side.

They were within striking distance. The burghers knew it. The Buffs drew closer and closer, so as to come right on the rear of the enemy, when the Boer scouts saw them. Instantly the alarm was raised, and the burghers, who were by this time half way up Kitchener's Hill, ran down again and mounted their horses at the foot. Hard they rode by the way they had come. But they did not get away cheaply. The Buffs halted and decimated them with a volley, and then charged them in the flank with the steel.

The rout was complete. Man after man went down, until some of the Dutchmen who were nearest to the British position, finding themselves cut off from all avenues of escape, finding the remorseless *rooineks* at their throats, finding those cruel knives on gun-barrels within a foot or two of their chests, threw down their rifles and surrendered. The Buffs reaped the greatest harvest. Eighty prisoners fell to them and many horses, while fifty Boers lay dead on the ground, and there were others whose bodies had been carried off. Altogether, between the rifles of the Yorkshires and the bayonets of the Buffs, the commando lost about one-fourth of its total number.

While this fight was going on, and, indeed, during the whole of Thursday and Friday, the cavalry and mounted infantry on the north and east were in a perpetual state of "Stand to your horses." For patrols of Boers hovered about all day, sniping occasionally. And these had to be driven off for fear they should occupy some position within range of our camp, which might form a base for their main commando. It were tedious and unprofitable to tell of all the skirmishes that befel, of all the rifle duels between the men of Kitchener's Horse and patrols of the Free Staters. It is sufficient to say that the British, playing a winning game all through,

drove the Boers away whenever any of them appeared within sight.

Damfontein Farm, whence French had driven the enemy's reinforcements on the Wednesday, was occupied by the small force of the British in the nature of an outpost.

During the whole of Friday the British guns never ceased to rain shells into the laager. The condition of the Boers was now pitiable, for the British guns did not cease their cannonade with the darkness. From Friday onwards they bombarded the laager, not only all day but all night, and what with burning waggons and want of sleep, and the screech of the bursting shells, and the fumes of the lyddite, the force invested in the bed of the Modder underwent an experience such as can hardly be paralleled in history. And it must be confessed that as day after day wore on, and still Cronje and his men held out, the British troops began to respect their foes as they had never respected them before. They began to realise that the Dutchman had courage in plenty of a kind —though it might not be exactly of the same kind as the cold steel courage of the British fighting man. And it is indubitable that no army other than an army of the greatest bravery could have endured for twenty-four hours the terrific punishment meted out by Lord Roberts's guns to the surrounded Boers.

On Friday night it began to rain. The fact ought to be mentioned, because the rain that fell on that night and the next two days had a considerable effect on the contest.

There was some incident on Friday. At sunrise the British outpost which held Damfontein Farm was attacked by a force numbering from 300 to 400. The assaulting party first of all attempted to rush the place; but the garrison was keeping a bright look-out, and the surprise failed. For about two hours there was heavy firing. French heard it, and promptly despatched Brigadier-General Porter with part of his brigade, which had arrived from Kimberley the day before, to assist the defence. Taking two squadrons of the fittest horses and a company of mounted infantry, with a battery of horse gunners, Porter hurried to the scene, and his mere appearance there was enough. He captured a few prisoners and killed seven men. This was the last attempt by any outside force to relieve Cronje. That is to say, it was the last attempt made in time to be of any service. In point of fact, Paul Kruger himself was at Bloemfontein, and was there collecting men to march to Paardeberg Drift to the rescue of his old comrade and friend, the Fighting General. But the levies were not yet organised.

While the men under General Roberts bivouacked on the open veldt in the pouring tropical rain on Friday night, close on 2,000 Boers, under Commandant de Beers, pushed up from the laager, along the river bed, slipped through the British sentries, and got clean away. The noise of the rain drowned their footsteps, and the night was so black that nothing was visible. Indeed, it is not without probability that if Cronje had taken advantage of the night to attempt to break out with all his force, he might have got away. But he did not.

His burghers crouched in the river bed, which now became fuller and fuller of water. The enduring gunners of the British kept up their never-ending bombardment. Words fail to describe the frightsome state of the Boer laager that night. Half-starving—for most of their food had been destroyed by the lyddite—without shelter from the merciless rain, which filled

their trenches and their shelters, the burghers passed the night. And all day Saturday, until the evening, the rain descended.

The British were in little better plight; for they, too, bivouacked in the open. But the men were cheerful. First of all, they were on the winning side. And, moreover, they were enduring this hardship, as they were enduring the scanty rations, and as they had endured the forced marches of the previous week, for the sake of "Bobs." Not a grumble was heard. For once the Englishman declined to use his dearest privilege.

Despite the pouring rain on Friday night and Saturday, the inexorable Canadians and Gordons and Cornwalls and Shropshires pushed their trenches nearer to the Boer laager. They were the most cheerful of all the brigades in the Army, though they had suffered as severely as most. For they expected soon to dig their way near enough to dash in upon the laager and repay the heavy debt they had contracted on the Sunday before.

It was on Saturday night and Sunday morning that the Boers began to feel the effect of the heavy rains. The weather had cleared up, it is true. But the downpour had caused the Modder to swell, and the water rushed down in a flood. It swept away horses and men. Over a thousand animals were swept down the river, past the drift to the east held by Kelly-Kenny's men. And, ghastly sight, the bodies of men, with their faces ever uppermost, floated down the stream. It was a sight never to be forgotten by those who witnessed it. And the pollution of the water by the dead bodies of the men and cattle had its deathly side for the British also. For the water of the river was all they had to drink; and many a stalwart fellow there contracted the germs of the malarial typhoid that proved more deadly to the British army than the bullets of the enemy.

So Sunday passed and Monday. The Boers had now been imprisoned for eight days. They had suffered from the effects of one pitched battle and a continuous bombardment. Their food was now practically at an end. Their clothing was ragged and plastered with mud. Sometimes angry knots of men went to the little bungalow which Cronje inhabited, and demanded that the general should surrender. But he would not hear of it; and did not hesitate at times to use upon the shoulders of the burghers his terrible sjambok.

So matters stood when night fell on Monday, the 26th of February, 1900.

CHAPTER LV.

A SUCCESSFUL NIGHT ATTACK—THE SURRENDER OF CRONJE.

THE whole affair began with a message from Fighting Mac. That is the worst of your Scotsman: he never forgets anything—particularly an injury. And was Majuba. And Hector Macdonald had been longing for nineteen years to get even with his conquerors and captors upon that occasion.

CRONJE SURRENDERS TO LORD ROBERTS.

Hector Macdonald had vivid recollections of a certain day in the year 1881, when a few Gordons and a handful of bluejackets and other small detachments had stood on the summit of a flat-topped hill in Northern Natal to be shot at. The day was the 27th of February, and the hill

He was not the only man in the British army who looked upon Majuba as a name that must be washed in blood before it could be spoken calmly by British lips.

And on the 26th of February, 1900, Macdonald, lying up with his wounded foot, indited a letter to his chief, of which

the substance was: "To-morrow is the anniversary of Majuba. Let us celebrate the day by capturing Cronje and his Boers."

Now, Roberts of Kandahar had a peculiar affection for the warlike Hector. For had not the Highlander, when only a non-commissioned officer, delivered Frederick Roberts from great personal peril? And the field-marshal had, besides, a great respect for the military judgment of his brigadier. For had he not seen him, when a colour-sergeant, display tactics of a high order in the mountains of Afghanistan?

So Lord Roberts began to think over the suggestion. He communicated Macdonald's message to Colvile, of the 9th Division. And Colvile thought worthily of it. And Colvile mentioned the matter to sundry officers. And soon the 9th Division was filled with a mysterious sense of something about to happen. It began to occur to everybody that to-morrow was Majuba Day; and it also began to occur to them that if the Fighting Dutchman could be hauled into the British camp as a prisoner on the morrow, it would be a royal wiping out of the old stain on the British arms.

Smith-Dorrien took up the idea, and with the assistance of some of his officers —notably Colonel Kincaid, of the Royal Engineers, and Major Pelletier, of the Canadian regiment—he evolved a plan. This plan was submitted to the commander-in-chief; but he, ever careful of the lives entrusted to his charge, at first declined to allow it to be put into execution, on the ground that it might involve considerable loss.

But the Canadians insisted. They were not afraid, they said, to risk their lives for the prestige of the Empire—a fact which they need not have insisted upon, because, since the battle of the 15th, it was notorious throughout the whole host. Sir Henry Colvile, who submitted the plan to his chief, pressed upon him the acceptance of it, and urged how disappointed the Canadians would be if they were not allowed to try it.

At last Lord Roberts assented.

The Canadians and the Gordons were entrenched on the north bank of the river in a trench nearly half a mile long, which had been gradually dug nearer and nearer to the Boer laager. The Canadians laid down to sleep early in the evening of the 26th, and at about two o'clock they were roused and ordered to make ready for the attack. They were briefly told that to them had been committed the honour of carrying Cronje's position, and that the moment had arrived for them to prove the worth and valour of the men of the Dominion.

They were to advance in two lines, the first with bayonets fixed and magazines charged, and the second, some thirty yards behind, ready to support their comrades. They were to rush silently to a spot that had been selected, within 100 yards of the first Boer trench. Then, if their presence had been discovered by the enemy, they were to lie down while shelter trenches were digged for them. Not a word was to be spoken, either by officer or man, but all orders were to be given by pressure from hand to hand.

The Gordon Highlanders, now the sworn brothers of the Canadians, were to follow as supports; and the Shropshires (of the same brigade) were to move off a little to the east, whence they could enfilade the advance trenches of the Boers.

That night the great host encircling the

laager was in a state of suppressed excitement. Everyone knew that something was afoot, though no one quite grasped what it was. Some said that deserters had brought in word of Cronje's intention to break out and make a dash for it that night. Others affected to believe that a general night attack was in contemplation.

The night was clear and fine, though the stars gave but a faint light, and there was little moon. The air was still, as though Nature itself held its breath on the eve of great events to come. And lying in a great circle, broken in two pieces by the river, men in khaki, with rifles loaded, lay watching. On the south-east the Buffs were stationed, drawn in a quarter circle about 2,500 yards from the laager. The whole battalion was lying in fairly close order, and every man had his rifle sighted to 2,500 yards. Lord Roberts thought it just possible that if the attack by Smith-Dorrien's brigade was successful, Cronje would do his best to break out; and if he did, he would undoubtedly make a dash for the point guarded by the Buffs. Wherefore the East Kent regiment had orders that on a given signal every man was to shoot straight ahead at the laager, and keep on shooting so long as he had a cartridge left.

At 2.35 the Canadians moved out of their trench. Into the darkness they tramped, bearing down steadily and remorselessly upon the Boer position, which was not more than 500 yards away. Pelletier's company of French-speaking soldiers had sought and had been accorded the privilege of being placed in the front rank. Through the scrub on the bank of the river the battalion tramped. Two hundred yards they went steadily.

Hark! is that a movement ahead? Have we been discovered by the Boer picket? A pressure passes from hand to hand along the line, and in silence the men halt, hardly daring to breathe. No! it is a false alarm. Another squeeze of the hand and the line this time rushes forward.

But there are Dutchmen who sleep lightly, and some of these hear a tramping of feet and the cracking of the scrub. A shot rings out. The Canadians are only eighty yards from the trench. Again a pressure of the hand, and the men throw themselves on the ground. From the line behind, fifty men of the 7th company Royal Engineers run forward bearing spades, and with lightning rapidity proceed to dig an entrenchment, throwing up the earth in front.

The Canadians, lying as flat as they can squeeze themselves, respond to another hand-pressure by levelling their rifles at the trench ahead and opening a deadly fire. From the trench, too, comes a fusillade fast and furious. But the Boers cannot see their enemy, and do not know how far away they are. On the other hand, the Canadians have had the distance carefully calculated beforehand, and they, firing low over the parapet behind which the Dutchmen crouch, are deadly. The defenders quail before the fusillade. Man after man, who has raised his head above the entrenchment to shoot, drops with a bullet through his brain, and in less than a quarter of an hour the Canadians have entirely subdued the musketry of the enemy. And from the east there comes another fire, as the Shropshires' rifles speak. The Boers are now thoroughly frightened. Their advanced trenches have clearly become untenable. From the front there proceeds such musketry as Cronje's men never before experienced; and, as if this were not punishment enough, the rifles on the east rake the trenches

and leave dead bodies and men running blood.

Kincaid and his Engineers work like fiends, for their trench must be finished by daylight. And so well and earnestly do they labour, that in about an hour they have constructed, three yards behind the front line, a rough but sufficient protection, into which the Canadians retire. Buffs on the east grip their rifles and wait for the signal to commence firing. But it never comes. At half-past three everything is silent—a silence only broken by an occasional shot as a Boer fires blindly from over the parapet. This night the British artillery ceased their bombardment before midnight, so that the laager is more at rest than ever it has been.

DE AAR JUNCTION.

The only show of resistance now made is when some Dutchman, holding his rifle above his head, shoves the muzzle over the parapet and fires into the darkness—a proceeding not specially hurtful to anybody, seeing that it is like firing with shut eyes.

Hearing the fusillade on the west, the whole camp, or rather all the camps, are in a state of tremendous excitement. What is it? Is old Cronje trying to break out on the west? Has Smith-Dorrien carried the advanced trenches? The

A tattered old man breaks into the little bungalow where Cronje, wakeful, sits, with the appalling news that the advance trenches are all lost. Then up comes Albrecht, the Austrian artillerist. He frankly and bluntly declares that the game is up. He is a professional soldier, and his trained mind recognised the fact that the British have now established themselves in such a position that the invested force can no longer hold out. "We will wait for daylight," Cronje says.

Day broke at last. And what did it

reveal? It revealed to the Canadians that eighty yards ahead of them were the Boer trenches. It revealed to the Boer general that within easy distance of his western defences there was a trench full of the hated *rooineks*. It revealed to him that even apart from this he could no longer maintain his defence on that quarter. For another trench held *rooineks* who could rake his trenches at point-blank range.

There was an excited meeting of commandants and field cornets. Cronje himself, even when he recognised that he could not hold out another day, would have fought to the bitter end making his men sell their lives dearly. He had told Lord Roberts that he would fight till he died, and he was prepared to do it. But not many were of his mind. They broke into open rebellion. They said it was flat murder to attempt to fight against such an overwhelming force, now that their position was untenable. In fact the burghers declared that if their general would not surrender they would.

Photo: [*Kennedy, Toronto.*

LIEUT.-COLONEL OTTER.
COMMANDING CANADIAN CONTINGENT.

The sun rose on the morning of Majuba Day, and the Canadians, who had accomplished only part of their self-imposed task, did not delay a minute in setting about the completion of it. They had been lying prone for about an hour, and during that time they had kept their bayonets fixed. There was no need for silence now. A bugle blew a stirring note, and, rising in their might, the Canadian regiment rushed with irresistible fury upon the trench in front. It was a sight to see and die—that line of magnificent soldiers, browned by the African sun, charging forward to restore the prestige of the British arms in South Africa.

No conscripts these; they had come from the wide Dominion freely and voluntarily; not upon promise of great rewards, but to fulfil their duty to Queen and Empire, and to show the world that Britain's sons would defend Britain's rights from every aggressor. If there exists in the whole world a finer body of men in arms than these it is in some very remote spot.

Across the narrow space that separated them from the beleaguered foe they went at the double—a tremendous machine, stiff as a wall and bristling with points.

But not a shot greeted them. They had expected to be met by such a storm of musketry as would thin their ranks. Instead, three white flags were hastily thrust above the parapet of the Boer entrenchments, and the Canadians, on the word, halted.

It was true at last. Majuba was wiped out, and Canada had avenged Britain.

Sir Henry Colvile dashed up at the gallop. "They have surrendered," he said; and on the word a stern, deep note of triumph broke from the throats of the Canadians. The Gordons behind heard it, and let loose their terrible cry, like some thunderclap suddenly bursting over the

river. And the Shropshire men, too, grasped the significance of the cheering, and bayed a "Hurrah!"

On the other side of the laager the Buffs were lying, still with rifles loaded, when one of their officers thought he saw something. Up went his glass, and he suddenly ejaculated, "White flag!" Hardly were the words out of his mouth when a horseman appeared riding out of the river bed, unarmed and bearing a white flag fastened to a stick. A staff officer rode to meet him, and soon it was settled. "General Cronje wishes to treat with Lord Roberts for surrender." "Then you must come with me, sir, to receive the answer of the commander-in-chief."

The envoy was soon riding back to the river bed with a message that Lord Roberts would receive General Cronje at once; and in a very short time there appeared riding out two men. One, mounted on a white horse, holding in his hand the dreaded sjambok, thick-set and grim, with a brown smashed felt hat pulled well over a face which seemed a very thicket of hair, with two glowing sparks set in it, rode a few paces ahead. As he came towards their line the Buffs gazed with curiosity not unmingled with admiration. For this was Cronje himself—the Fighting General—the conqueror of Methuen, the man of Magersfontein and Potchefstroom, the general who had kept the British army at bay for ten days, and had not quailed under the most awful bombardment within the recollection of man.

To meet the redoubtable Dutchman and his companion rode General Pretyman with a small escort of horse, and after the exchange of a few courtesies, the little party slowly rode over the plain to the headquarters of Field-Marshal Lord Roberts.

Cronje looked with some curiosity at the little trim figure of a man who, as he himself dismounted, stepped forward to meet him with outstretched hand. "Commandant Cronje—Lord Roberts," said Pretyman, by way of introduction.

The victor was all courtesy. As he shook the great brown hand that met his own he spoke his first word.

"I am glad to see you. I am glad to meet so brave a man."

The two men, so utterly unlike, save that each had courage and ability, stepped towards Lord Roberts's tent, and there seated themselves. The British field-marshal was dressed in a plain khaki suit, with no badge of distinction other than the sword presented to him by his countrymen to commemorate Kandahar. Nor had the Boer commandant anything in his dress to denote that he was the leader of an army. He was in a long brown overcoat, unbuttoned, disclosing a muddy and ragged suit of brown cloth. Of military rank he wore no symbol, not even a sword. In fact, you would have mistaken him for a cattle drover rather than for one of the finest fighters and subtlest of living tacticians.

Victor and vanquished talked for a good hour—Lord Roberts kindly but firm, Cronje broken but still grim. He tried to make terms. He asked that all his men should be released on parole after giving up their arms. He asked for guarantees of this and that. But Roberts knew better than to listen to any offers. "I will accept nothing," he said, "short of unconditional surrender. You must trust yourself in my hands and the hands of the British Government for the best treatment that can be accorded to you consistently with our duty."

At last Cronje blurted out "Ja."

It was accomplished now. The tide of war had turned. Cronje, the Fighting

General, had surrendered unconditionally with his whole army to the representative of the Queen. And thus did the British army in South Africa celebrate the day on which nineteen years before their arms had sustained a reverse and their prestige a blow the greatest within the memory of man.

To the Canadians and their leader, Lieutenant-Colonel Otter, the chief credit was due; and no part of the regiment earned greater glory than the French-speaking company.

The Queen was prompt to recognise the part played by her loyal subjects of the Dominion in this success—a success that had broken the horrid tale of defeats and repulses so trying to a proud people. To Lord Minto, the Governor-General of Canada, she telegraphed :—

"Her Majesty the Queen desires you to express to the people of the Dominion her admiration of the gallant conduct of her Canadian troops in the late engagement, and her sorrow at the loss of so many brave men."

And from all parts of the Empire congratulations poured in on the gallant Colonials. Cape Colony, by its Governor-General, Sir Alfred Milner, rejoiced with the sister colony. "I congratulate you," Sir Alfred Milner telegraphed to Lord Minto, "on the noble share taken by the troops from your colony." And so said all of us.

As to Canada—from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from the St. Lawrence to the far frozen north — she was one blaze of triumph. The French-speaking colony of Quebec had especial reason to be proud of her sons; and heads were held higher, and eyes shone more brightly as the messages came from under the sea telling how those gallant fellows had sustained the honour of their brave ancestors and their native soil.

"A gallant deed worthy of our colonial comrades." Thus the field-marshal who had never been known to exaggerate. Could any praise be higher than this? Canada had freely offered of her hard-earned gold and her best blood and valour to help the cause of the Empire; but little had she imagined that to her would fall so great a glory as this. A regiment untried and almost untrained, under fire only for the second time in its career, had brought to his knees an enemy who had defeated and for two months held at bay some of the best troops in the British army. Small wonder that the *Soleil*, a Montreal journal, should break out thus :—

"God save the Queen! To her Majesty Queen Victoria. Your loyal subjects of French extraction in Canada share the joy of the British Empire over the great victory won by its army in the Orange Free State. May this victory bring an end to the war in which the blood of our own sons has been shed with that of the sons of the Motherland. May England also never forget that the Canadians were at the post of honour."

England did not forget, nor ever will forget.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE RELIEF OF LADYSMITH—THE PROLOGUE.

HARDLY had the army moved back from Spearman's Camp and Springfield to Chieveley than movements began again. The last man of Warren's division reached the old camp on February 11th, and on the 12th General Buller took the first step on his new route. There were left behind at Springfield Bridge all the regular regiments of the Cavalry Brigade, under Colonel Murdoch.

The object of leaving these behind was to hold in check certain raiding parties of the enemy who had crossed the Tugela at Potgeiter's Drift after Buller had given the order to retreat from Vaal Krantz.

It might have been better in many respects for the British general to have left some of his Colonial horsemen to deal with the raiders, for it must be confessed that the Dutchmen were much too slim for the British cavalry.

For instance, on the 10th of February, when the rest of the army was on the march to Chieveley, a patrol of the Royals (6th Dragoons) went out across the bridge from Springfield to scout in a northerly direction. They left at daylight, and at about half-past six the camp was startled by hearing the sound of a heavy fire from the north.

Now, when a regiment of cavalry is in proximity to the enemy, in addition to pickets there is always one squadron called the "in-lying" picket, whose horses are kept saddled ready for emergencies. To them came an order from Burn-Murdoch to mount and ride in the direction of the firing. Away went the in-lying picket at a gallop, with a few men pushed out on the flanks and in front to scout. Suddenly there appeared round the shelter of a ridge the flying figure of a horse with its rider spurring it to utmost speed. Seeing the British squadron, the man pulled up and gasped out: "Our squadron has been cut up." It was a sergeant of the Royals.

The in-lying picket moved on smartly ahead, and presently saw some men on weedy ponies on a high hill. A troop to right. We must cut those beggars off if we can. And at highest speed away galloped a troop to attempt to circumvent the Boers. But the Boers were far too wily to be circumvented, and, after firing a few shots at the squadron, retired. Then the in-lying picket rode ahead again and came upon the squadron that had been cut off.

What had happened was an event only too common. This squadron had gone out, as has been told, and was climbing a hill in the half-light. On the top of this hill were Boers—one of the raiding parties alluded to above. And the Boers heard and saw the British cavalry toiling up the hill. So they acted much as sportsmen would have acted had they seen a herd of deer coming unsuspiciously towards them.

A British party in the same sort of position would have challenged the enemy afar off. The picket who saw them com-

ing would have shouted, "Who goes there," and followed this up by a shot to alarm his comrades. But the wily Dutchmen did nothing of the kind. They allowed a subaltern and six men in advance of the main body to ride straight past them—they themselves being completely hidden. Then they let the squadron walk up within 150 yards of their hiding-place. Then, suddenly, with cool, deliberate aim, they let drive. An officer rolled over, badly wounded. A trooper pitched off his horse stark dead. Half a dozen others also came down, and many a fine charger was stretched on the hill-side. The squadron defended itself desperately, but the men who had ridden ahead were cut off and captured, and only the timely arrival of the in-lying picket availed to save the rest of the men from being shot down or made prisoners.

This occurrence, unpleasant as it was, served as some warning, and thereafter Burn-Murdoch's cavalry acted with a little more caution. But it was still a matter of complaint that the Regulars who were sent to do scouting work did it most imperfectly. There was, of course, this excuse: that the eyes of men largely trained in towns could not see with anything like the clearness of those trained in the country. If you should be inclined to doubt this, try yourself how far away from the object you can see a sheep on a mountain side, and then find some native of the mountain district and try how far away he can see it. You will probably be astonished. But, making every allowance that can legitimately be made, it is still true to say that the British Regular had too much "eyes front" about him. He did not look round as he ought to have done.

On the whole, however, Burn-Murdoch managed to keep the bridge at Springfield, and to patrol the country round about so effectively as to prevent the Boers from penetrating south of him. And soon the Boers had quite enough of it to the north—so much that there was little inclination, and no power on their part to push their invasion further.

Of which this history is now about to tell.

General Buller, having failed through small fault of his own to turn the Boer left, *viâ* Trichardt's Drift and Acton Homes; and having failed to cut their army in two at Vaal Krantz; having failed also in his first battle to carry their main position at Colenso, resolved to try to turn their left.

The turning of the left means working round on the left enemy's flank, so that he would be on the side or in the rear of their main position. Thus, if you imagine an enemy advancing to attack London from the south, with a British army reaching from Gravesend, as its left, to Richmond, as its right, and the enemy managed to push a force over the Thames below Gravesend, the British left would be turned. And if the British general, under such circumstances, did not bring his left wing back over the river to meet the enemy's right wing, he would find himself with an army on the rear of part of his own force and ready to attack him from the side. Which would mean that they could enfilade him while the main body of the invaders attacked him in the front.

Buller was resolved to get to Ladysmith; and he had now come to the conclusion that he must do so by the way he had first thought of, namely, along the road running from Colenso to the beleaguered city.

But, as we have seen, it was suicidal to attempt to force a passage this way by a direct attack. It had been bad enough in

December—it would have been fifty times worse in February. And this for the simple reason that the Boers, who had recognised just as well as Buller eventually recognised, that this was the only practical road for an army marching to relieve Ladysmith, had spent the additional two months in fortifying the Colenso position.

And truly they had made it a very Sebastopol. Their entrenchments were not like entrenchments at all. They were like the forts which protect great cities. They were not merely rows of trenches or the kind usually constructed in the open field. They were thick walls of earthworks, sloping down perfectly smooth over a considerable distance. You observe the significance of this. To carry these fortifications by assault the stormers would be obliged to advance up these artificial slopes, and during the advance would have not a vestige of cover of any kind. And to prevent their redoubts from being made untenable by shell fire, they had constructed overhead shelters or roofs. In fact, for several miles the Boer position was of the same character as the fortifications of Paris, or any of the other great European fenced cities. It is safe to say that since Wellington built the ramparts of Torres Vedras there had never been such formidable fortifications erected in the open.

All of which goes to show that what had been risky in December had become utterly impossible in February.

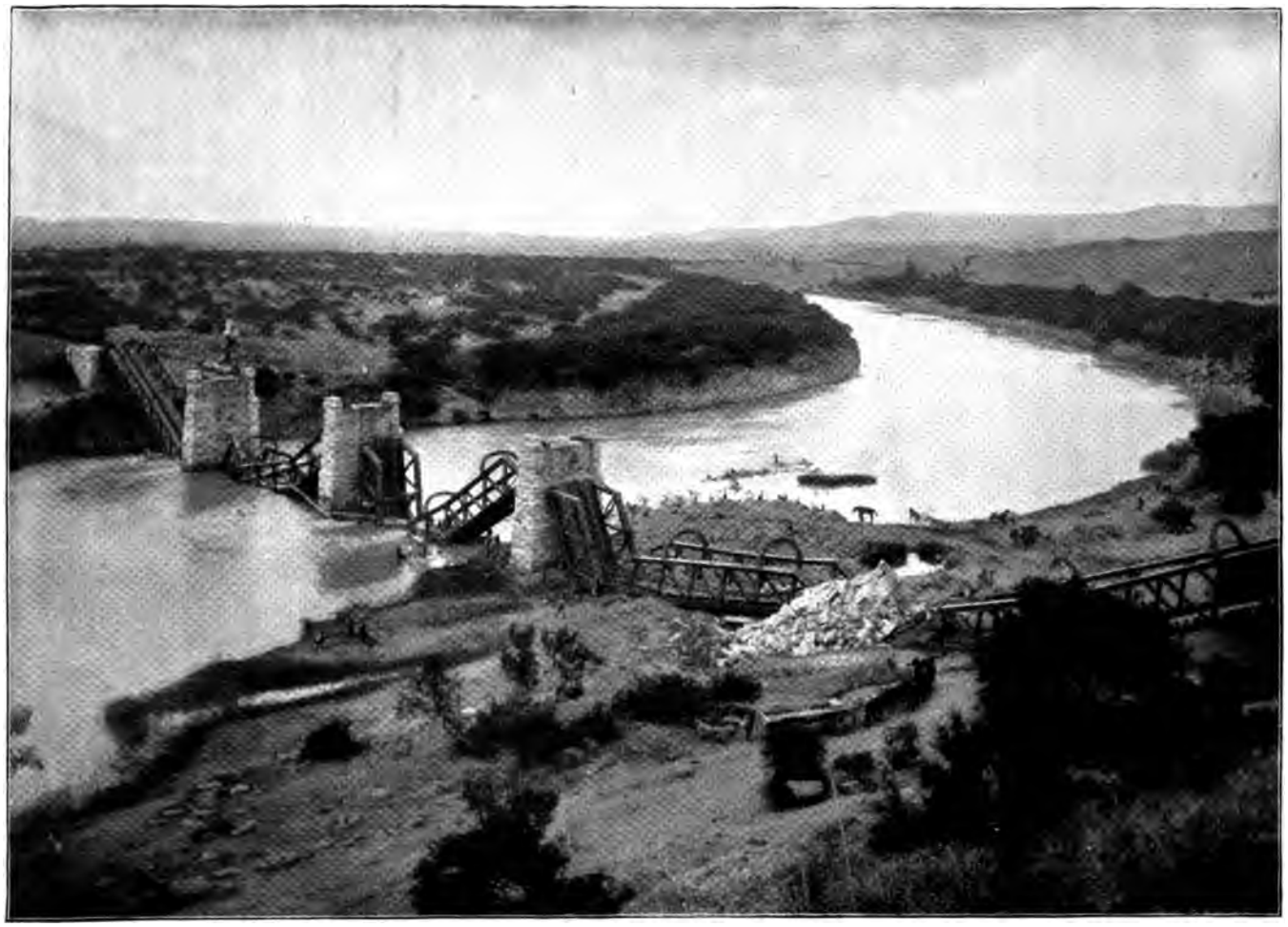
But this formidable position, though it could not be carried by a frontal attack, might be made untenable by a flank attack; and General Buller began to devise plans for reaching it on the flank. He made his first move on the 12th of February. It was necessary for him to get possession of some height on his right which would enable him to see into the Boer left. Wherefore, on the 12th, he ordered the irregular cavalry (which included all mounted troops) to seize a hill to the east of Chieveley called Hussar Hill. It had received this name from the British soldiery because it was the scene of the surprise of the Hussar picket. (See page 418.)

It is necessary for the proper comprehension of the newest phase of the Natal campaign, for the reader to understand the geography of the country to the right of Colenso. Hussar Hill was one of four kopjes hereabouts. The other three were Hlangwane (nearest to the Tugela where it runs north and south), Monte Cristo (to the north-east of Hlangwane), and Green Hill, a spur of Hlangwane between it and Monte Cristo.

Anyone who could take Monte Cristo and Green Hill would stand a very good chance of capturing Hlangwane. And he who had possession of Hlangwane, provided he could mount artillery upon it, would have little difficulty in making Fort Wylie and Colenso, and all the fortifications thereabouts quite untenable, because he would be able to shell them from the side.

The operation upon which Dundonald's regular cavalry was sent out on February 12th was nothing more than a reconnaissance, partly to see whether Hussar Hill could be taken, and partly to find out how far Monte Cristo was vulnerable.

At 8 a.m. General Lord Dundonald, with the South African Light Horse, the Natal Composite Regiment under Major Gough, Thorneycroft's mounted infantry, and Dundonald's own private battery of galloping guns of the Colt pattern, mounted on the light carriage he himself had invented, set out from the cavalry camp.



COLENSO RAILWAY BRIDGE DESTROYED BY THE BOERS.

Behind them followed, by way of infantry support, the Welsh Fusiliers and a battery of field guns.

The first object of the reconnaissance was to capture Hussar Hill and hold it for a time—such time, in fact, as would enable Sir Redvers Buller and his staff to take observations through their telescopes of the ground to the north. Wherefore the mounted troops went as swiftly and secretly as they could, taking care to hide themselves behind rising ground most of the way straight over the kopje.

The surprise succeeded. The hill was only occupied by a small patrol of the enemy, and this was soon driven out with a loss of one or two wounded. Then the irregulars were spread out in crescent shape all round the further side of the hill. Their business was the holding back of any reinforcements that might come up to support the Boer patrol, and keep the ground safe for the commander. For about three hours a long range musketry duel was kept up—not very much to the hurt of anybody; and after Sir Redvers Buller had spent about an hour on the hill-top reconnoitring the country ahead, the reconnaissance was judged to be over, and the irregular horsemen were ordered to mount and ride back to camp.

This took time, because there were riflemen within range; and, of course, as soon as a man left his cover in order to withdraw, he was made a mark of. The only method of getting clear without loss was for the men to be retired a few at a time, while those remaining kept up a brisk fusillade.

Eventually all the outlying pickets were extricated, and the whole force quitted the hill—the infantry and field battery first, then the Colt battery, and last of all the South African Light Horse. On the way home to camp from Hussar Hill there is first a dip of about two miles and then a ridge—and the reconnoitrers made for this ridge, because it would afford them protection from pursuit.

Immediately the Boers found that our men had retired, they followed up and re-took Hussar Hill. They managed to arrive there just as the last of the S.A.L.H. were getting out of the open ground between the hill and the ridge. The squadrons were just beginning to congratulate themselves that they got away scot free, when a single shot cracked out from the kopje behind them.

It was the usual sharpshooter finding the range for the rest. For it was the invariable custom of the Boers to select one or two men to fire shots, to watch where these shots struck, and so to find out the range. Then quickly Hussar Hill became a blaze of musketry; and it might have gone hard with the retreating squadrons if the range-finding shot had been reasonably accurate. But for some reason or other the Boers were shooting short.

The Colonial troops had by this time learned much. And one of the things they had learned was to open out at a canter when they came under fire. They were very soon in extended order, and ere long the whole of the British had gained the shelter of the ridge. The serious fighting of the day began.

The range was about 2,000 yards from ridge to hill-top, though it was very much longer to walk. Dundonald ordered up his Colt battery, and despatched a galloper to tell the infantry and the field guns to return. It was a very curious skirmish. The combatants could not see each other, except by the aid of glasses. And here the Boers had some advantage, because a

great many of the burghers carried field-glasses; while amongst the British, no one carried these necessary articles except the officers.

But the Colt battery made up for a good many disadvantages. Dundonald's light gun-carriages could be moved by hand, so that the horses were taken out of them, and each gun was moved from point to point by the men who worked it as such movement became necessary. The Colts proved exceedingly useful. They kept up such a hot and ceaseless fire upon the hill in front, that the Boer musketry began to fade away, and at about half-past three in the afternoon the skirmish was over. The Boers lost all stomach for further pursuit, and so soon as Lord Dundonald felt sure of this, he retired his men to the camp. One officer and eleven men wounded was the loss of the brigade. The Boers, on the other hand, lost much more heavily, including several men killed by the Colt battery.

What had been the result of the reconnaissance? It had been this: Sir Redvers Buller had seen that if he wished to capture Hlangwane Hill, he must attack it not in the same way that he had attacked it on the day of Colenso Battle. For the Boers had fortified it strongly—so strongly, that to make a frontal attack would be ruinously expensive. He must attack it on the flank—that is, he must send men to the north of the hill to capture Monte Cristo and Green Hill, and from these deliver his attack upon the weakest side of Hlangwane.

Having determined what his course of operations must be, Buller lost little time in making a move. On Wednesday, the 14th, he marched his army out of Chieveley Camp to the east. The Irregular Cavalry Brigade went ahead under the indefatigable Dundonald, to clear the way for the infantry, and after a short skirmish between them and about 1,000 Dutchmen entrenched in the dongas and on the hill itself, they took possession of Hussar Hill.

The division that had been Clery's was now under the command of General Lyttelton, Clery being ill, and this division led the way. Warren's division followed, leaving only General Hart's brigade to guard the camp at Chieveley.

Although the Boers had not held Hussar Hill in any great force, nor had made any particular defence of it with such troops as were there, it was evident that they did not like losing it. For as soon as Dundonald had cleared it and taken possession, a large number of the burghers rode from Hlangwane, dismounted, and made to attack and re-take the kopje. But Dundonald had his pet Colt battery already on the top. Moreover, his men were not of the kind to let go anything they had once grasped; and machine gun and rifle and carbine kept the Dutchmen at bay for about an hour.

Then appeared on the scene the first of the British infantry—the Irish Fusiliers; and as soon as the Boers saw this battalion deployed for the attack they retreated at full speed. The Irish Fusiliers followed a little, just enough to send the Boers scurrying back to Hlangwane, and then the battalion struck eastward again and took possession of some low hills further east than Hlangwane Hill. These hills are known as Moord Kraal, and they form the southern side of the valley of which Monte Cristo and the Cingolo hills form the northern side.

Lyttelton's old brigade, now under Colonel Norcott, with Hildyard's brigade, swept round by another route towards the

same object; and when night fell on the 14th the whole strength of the British army in Natal was encamped along a front of about two miles, separated from the Boer left by the Gomba valley.

The 15th was a day of the kind much detested by Tommy Atkins. There was no fighting, nor even any marching. The army was occupied in all manner of fatigue duty, and as the day was a blistering hot one, unexciting hard work was harder than usual.

The sailors and men of the Royal Artillery had the hardest work, for it was their job to bring up from Chieveley the heavy guns. Buller had now some artillery of sufficient calibre to cope with anything that the Boers might possess. Two siege guns, two naval 4·7's and four naval 12-pounders, with four howitzers, formed a combination of engines of destruction hard to beat. These were dragged and hauled from Chieveley to Hussar Hill upon the south side and summit; they were placed on the 15th.

That day and the next, and the day after, the British monsters threw missiles across the valley at Green Hill and Monte Cristo, with a few directed at Hlangwane.

There had been a good deal of attacking in the dark hitherto. Buller determined that this time he would learn as much as he could of the enemy's position before ordering an assault. Wherefore on the 16th Hildyard's brigade reconnoitred the slopes of Monte Cristo, and were able to report at the end of the day that the position was quite practicable.

LIEUT.-COL. THORNEYCROFT AND HIS ADJUTANT.

The capture of Hussar Hill had been only the prologue to the drama about to be unfolded. The main body of the infantry rested for the days between the 14th and the 16th of February. These two days were the last hours of rest they would

have between Chieveley and Ladysmith. The bloody part of the march was about to begin. The dozen miles of ground between White's southern defences and Buller's camp was to be the scene of a battle, or rather a series of battles, of the like of which military history contains no record.

We have read with wonder and pride how British soldiers under the Iron Duke once fought for forty-eight hours. But a fight was to begin that should last ten days, a fight the most stubborn that was ever waged in the open, where position after position, hill after hill, entrenchment after entrenchment, was defended and carried with unparalleled obstinacy and valour.

Buller and his men had seen bloody work since the day they tried to force the passage of the Tugela at Colenso. But all they had seen, all they had experienced hitherto, was as nothing compared to the things they should see and experience ere they shook the thin and feeble hands of comrades in Ladysmith.

Though the main body of the army rested after Hussar Hill was captured, they did not all rest. Dundonald did not rest an hour, nor Hildyard. For these two, with their English footmen and Colonial horsemen, were trying to "find the Boer left."

Finding an enemy's flank, be it right or left, consists of sending out skirmishers on that flank, spreading out wider and wider until at last you come to the extreme end of the enemy's line. The operation requires care, because while you are spreading out you are thinning your own line ; and the enemy, if his movements be screened by a hill or a fort, may suddenly concentrate at one point, dash at your thin line, and break it—a serious disaster.

The Queens, the West Yorks, the East Surreys, and the Devons, after Hussar Hill was taken, struck east, always keeping in touch with the enemy. The Colonial Horse accompanied them, sometimes riding on ahead to scout, sometimes dismounting to skirmish. By companies and sections, by squadrons and troops, the infantry and the mounted men pressed on. It was slow work, for they had to scour every donga and hillock on the way. And they had to move about with due regard to cover, for every man who showed himself too openly was liable to fall a victim to a long sniping shot.

From the 14th to the 17th of February Hildyard and Dundonald skirmished, advancing at the rate of three yards an hour or thereabouts. At the end of the day of the 17th they had "found the left," and discovered that it rested on Monte Cristo Hill and a ridge called the Cingolo, of which Monte Cristo was the highest point. A vigorous rush by the Natal Carbineers and a squadron of the Imperials cleared the eastermost spur of the Cingolo ; and the second part of the preliminary operations had been accomplished. At last the mobile enemy was outflanked.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE RELIEF OF LADYSMITH—THE FIRST ACT.

AS we have said, it was necessary to the capture of Hlangwane to first take the hill called Monte Cristo. To put it in military parlance, Hlangwane was the key of Colenso and Monte Cristo was the key of Hlangwane. On the evening of the 17th, Hildyard's Brigade had stretched itself out to the right and had finally struck the range of hills called Cingolo, of which Monte Cristo was one. Assisted by Lord Dundonald's cavalry they had threatened to work round to the Boer rear, and this had so perturbed the Dutchmen as to cause them to retire from the end of their line and to concentrate their left on Monte Cristo.

Hildyard's operation of "finding the Boer left" was carried out at a comparatively trifling loss, chiefly because the fighting had been all at long range. The cavalry went out scouting, and presently returned with the welcome intelligence that there were no entrenchments between the captured position on the end of the Cingolo Hills and Monte Cristo. This meant that an attack could be made on Monte Cristo at any time. And Buller, on the night of the 17th, ordered Hildyard's brigade to make the attack at daylight the next day. It was to be no surprise; no marching up to the foot of the position in the night and storming it in the light of the sun's first rays. It was to be a daylight attack, carried out in set form.

With the rising of the sun Hildyard's brigade was under arms. The men had been roused in the dark and had eaten some sort of scanty breakfast before light appeared. For General Hildyard wanted to be as expeditious as circumstances and his commander would allow him, and he purposed carrying Monte Cristo while the day was young. Having obtained possession of one end of the ridge, all he had to do was to march his men along the high ground, then a dip down and across a nek or pass, and so reach the side of Monte Cristo.

Hildyard's own old regiment had the honour of the lead, and they swung out of the bivouac at a steady pace and with a firm tread. They had not enjoyed a good bayonet charge since the night they broke into the Boer laager at Estcourt. Behind the men of the White Rose, the Queen's West Surrey and the East Surrey Regiments marched as supports.

When you read that the battalions marched along the ridge to the attack, you must not imagine that the march was anything like such marches as you have seen at reviews, or anything of that sort. The ground to be covered here was sloping; it was broken by huge rocks, intersected by dongas, and woody enough to make it perfectly impossible for the men to keep touch or march in line. So the march was more like a scramble than the usual orderly movements of a British infantry battalion.

But the broken nature of the ground was by no means a disadvantage. Had

the West Yorkshires been advancing over smooth, grassy land, they would have been shot down like rabbits. But the boulders protected them from the enemy's musketry ; the trees screened them from his sight, the dongas formed convenient shelters in which they could in perfect security lie down and rest for a few moments.

While the three English regiments were swarming along the ridge the artillery on both sides was making itself heard and felt also. In addition to the powerful armament of heavy guns which have been described, General Buller had forty-two field guns and one mountain battery (six guns)—altogether sixty-six pieces of artillery, light and heavy. Of course this does not include such small fry as Colts, Maxims, and other guns that fire bullets instead of shells. All the sixty-six pieces were fired as fast as they could load at Monte Cristo, Green Hill, and Hlangwane. And although it is extremely doubtful whether they wrought very much havoc, yet it is certain that they made the Boers a little shaky and disinclined to expose themselves. But, although the artillery boomed away from daylight onwards, the real fighting was done by the infantry.

While Hildyard's brigade was advancing along the Cingolo ridge, with intent to work round to the back of the Boer position at Monte Cristo, the rest of the army was not idle. On the extreme flank of the English brigade Dundonald's mounted troops were at work, all except Thorneycroft's mounted infantry, of whom we shall have to speak later.

Continuing the British line on the left of Hildyard's brigade were the riflemen, with the Rifle Brigade in front. It was the task of these troops to assault the nek which connected Green Hill and Monte Cristo. On the left of them again, Barton's fusilier brigade was extended, having the task of assaulting Green Hill itself.

Photo ℓ] A SIX-SPAN OX WAGGON LOADED WITH CHAFF. *[James Gribble, Paarl.*

It should be said that Green Hill, though not so high as Monte Cristo, was very strongly fortified, and was held by the Boers in force. For they could not, in the beginning, see Hildyard's advance on Monte Cristo, though they had a good view of the Fusilier Brigade working towards Green Hill. They, therefore, not unnaturally came to the conclusion that Buller's attack was to be made on Green Hill, and this reasoning was the more plausible because an assault on Green Hill would at once cause Hlangwane to be in peril, and would be the shortest way to the capture of that stronghold.

So you have the British force spread out in an enormous line, consisting of Dundonald's cavalry on the extreme right flank, the Queen's West Surreys and the West Yorks in the front line, forming the right ; next to them the Rifle Brigade forming the centre ; and in touch with these the Royal Scottish and Royal Irish Fusiliers forming the left. This was the front line. Behind the battalions named, there moved in support the other battalions of their respective brigades.

Along the Cingolo the Queen's and the Yorkshiremen slowly worked their way. Part of Dundonald's force had dismounted and skirmished on foot. For several miles the fighting was of a very desultory character. There were Boers scattered about the ground in twos and threes, hidden by bushes and concealed in dongas and behind boulders. These the hardy Colonials and the steady British infantry drove from bush to bush in skirmishing fashion.

The way the fighting went on was this : You spotted a bush or a boulder whence rifle bullets proceeded. You crept along on your own account, taking advantage of every stone and tree and bit of scrub, watching for a chance to shoot your man. If you did not get such a chance, as you probably would not, you pressed on to within twenty yards of him, and then you rushed for his bush or his boulder and dug him out with your bayonet.

It was the kind of work that required a good deal of nerve and considerable judgment ; for if you happened to make your rush at the wrong time, the Dutchman would shoot you at pistol-shot distance. This kind of fighting was not very regular, nor could it be conducted according to rules as laid down in the Infantry Drill Book. It was a kind of bush fighting more adapted to irregular troops than to English infantry. But somehow the Yorkshires and the Queen's worried along and drove the Boers from bush to bush, from shelter to shelter, gradually working towards Monte Cristo.

On the left a rifle duel was proceeding. Lyttelton's old brigade, now Norcott's, advanced in open order towards the nek between the two hills and encountered a fire of exceeding warmth. Every Dutchman from the topmost slopes and the summit of Monte Cristo and Green Hill, as well as marksmen entrenched on the nek itself, gave them volley after volley, from right and left and front. But the riflemen gained a few yards here and a few yards there, keeping cool and firing to cover their advance.

The assault on Green Hill was also in progress. From earliest dawn Thorneycroft's mounted infantry, who had established themselves in front of Green Hill just before sunrise, were comfortably potting at the foe above. They had not only their rifles to trust to, but three of the Colt guns, and they kept up a swift and bewildering fire upon the upper slopes and the summit of Green Hill.

At about 9 a.m. the Fusilier Brigade, under General Barton, came up in the rear of Thorneycroft's men, passed through them, and began to crawl up the side of the hill. Pom-poms scattered strings of shells amongst them. A huge Creusot gun roared at them. The Dutch riflemen fired with all their wonted skill and coolness. But inch by inch the Scottish and Irish Fusiliers pressed on and up.

The artillery on and about Hussar Hill had been occupied since daylight in shelling Green Hill and Monte Cristo and a nek between them. The Naval Brigade thoroughly enjoyed itself. For once in a way there could be no doubt that the lyddite did some damage. Hardly had a big Creusot gun opened fire than one of the Naval 12-pounders set to work to silence it. No fewer than six attempts were made ineffectually ; but at the seventh a shell dropped in the emplacement of the 94-pounder, and it spoke no more that day.

At noon the British attack was well developed. The Queen's and the West Yorkshires had reached the end of the Cingolo ridge, and arrived at the nek connecting it with Monte Cristo. The two battalions then dipped a little and went slightly to the right, so bringing their line on the far slope of the hill. If they could rush the position from this side, Botha's left flank was turned. The only question was whether infantry could successfully assault such a position as this.

Dundonald's men were mounted again now, and were flying about the eastward slope of Monte Cristo, cutting down and driving in numbers of the enemy who fled from the terrible lyddite to take up positions amongst the boulders on the hill side. It was work which could not have been done except by skilled skirmishers, keen soldiers, and splendid horsemen. If you can imagine men on horseback galloping about the hills which lie between Loch Goyle on the Clyde and Loch Eck, you will be able to form some idea of the kind of country that had to be galloped over by the South African Light Horse and the other bold troopers of Dundonald's brigade. There were dongas and boulders and trees and bushes. Every horseman had to ride and fight upon his own account, merely being told in a general way what work was to be done. But, despite the difficulties and dangers, the irregular horse hunted the Dutchmen up and down, and prevented them from taking up positions from which they could annoy the advancing infantry.

Hitherto Hildyard's advance had been slow, as you can well imagine if you consider the nature of the country and the bush-fighting that had to be done.

But now, having reached the slopes of Monte Cristo itself, he formed the West Surreys and the West Yorks into line and prepared for a quick and desperate assault upon the hill. Nor were the battalions in any way behind. With a coolness altogether amazing, they formed in a thin loose line on the slope. Their bayonets were already fixed, and for a few moments they stood silent and motionless, craving the word that should launch them at the foe on the hill top. Strange to say, they were subjected to only a slight fire of musketry. In point of fact the bursting shells of the Naval guns and the howitzers gave the Boers on Monte Cristo quite enough to attend to. Besides, the hill was so fortified as to meet an attack coming from the other direction. Hildyard had worked round to the rear of the position ; and if the Boers desired to face round to meet him, their marksmen would be almost as much without cover as his own infantry.

Anxiously the staff on Hussar Hill

watched through their glasses the slopes of Monte Cristo. At half-past twelve an exclamation burst from one of them, "I see bayonets among the trees!" It was the flash of the steel of the men of Surrey and the lads of Yorkshire.

With a yell startling to hear—a wild shout from the Surreys, a deep-chested defiance from the Yorkshiremen—the khaki line swung forward and threw itself at the position.

Mausers cracked as the burghers in despair emptied cartridge after cartridge into the on-coming ranks. But no musketry could check the brown line. The British infantry had come too near to be kept off by rifle fire, and with one tremendous rush they breasted the summit of the mountain, and at one o'clock their bayonets flashed as a signal that the Dutchmen had been driven out of their stronghold.

There was little slaughter. Here and there a flying burgher felt the full agony of the knife on a gun barrel. Now a crack shot of the West Surreys would suddenly drop on one knee and with hasty aim press the trigger, and a tattered man 500 yards ahead would double over on his face.

As soon as the fight came to push of bayonet the Boers fled from their entrenchments, ran to their tethered ponies, mounted, and rode to the rear. A large party of them headed for the River Tugela, not far away. But a squadron of the Natal Carbineers had dashed ahead, round the foot of the hill, and headed off the flying burghers. In desperate haste the hunted men turned their ponies' heads and fled lower down the stream; but they had to pass the whole width of the mountain, and a company of the West Surreys fired three volleys into them as they scurried past. Many a farmer found his grave on the veldt: for the Queen's could shoot, and this time the Dutchmen had no cover.

Thus, early in the afternoon of Sunday, the 18th of February, Hildyard and his English brigade, with Dundonald's cavalry, turned the left flank of Botha's army and opened the way to Ladysmith.

Hardly had the bayonets of the West Yorks and the Queen's flashed from the summit of Monte Cristo, than Buller ordered the rest of the line to advance. Up springs the Rifle Brigade, up spring the Fusiliers, and with a mighty rush sweep forward. But the Boers on Green Hill and the lower ground between the hills had seen the gleam of steel on their left. They had heard the cheers of the English brigade, and they knew that from this moment they could only stay to fight at the risk of being absolutely cut off and either captured or exterminated.

So, as the Fusiliers strode steadfastly forward up one side of Green Hill, the Boers who manned its fortifications hastily removed their guns and fled down the other side. As soon as Barton's men felt the fire dying away, they rushed forward at redoubled speed, and in a few minutes after the first triumphant shouts of Hildyard's men were heard from Monte Cristo, the Royal Scots and the Royal Irish Fusiliers stood in the Boer trenches on Green Hill, where they plied the steel with might and main.

At the same moment the Rifle Brigade charged the nek which connected the two, and here also the resistance died away. The riflemen were soon at the top, and ahead of them they saw a body of horsemen, numbering from 2,000 to 3,000, manœuvring between themselves and the Tugela. They were quite within rifle-shot, and, moreover, the Rifle Brigade had

SCOTTISH FUSILIERS GOING THROUGH THE BRUSHWOOD ON MONTE CRISTO.

a Maxim gun. After some minutes, the officers concluded that the force ahead was Dundonald's irregular cavalry.

In fact it was the main body of the Boer left wing, and had the mistake not been made the Rifle Brigade might have decimated them and turned their orderly retreat into a disorderly rout. Here was seen the disadvantage of our Colonial troops wearing the soft felt hats like those worn by the enemy. No doubt such headgear is on the whole the best to be worn in South Africa. Baden-Powell had said so several years before, and his word was weighty.

But it should never be forgotten in choosing the dress for soldiers that you ought to clothe your own men in such a style as to make them readily distinguishable from the enemy. Wellington knew this, and he protested vehemently when the 'Horse Guards' of his day attempted to clothe his Peninsular army in headgear like the French. He said that a commander ought to be able to tell his own men from all others as far as the eye could see. And, in fact, one of the worst disasters experienced by the Iron Duke in Spain occurred when a body of English troops, who were dressed in blue uniform, were mistaken by another British battalion for Frenchmen*; with the result that the unfortunate wearers of the blue uniform were shattered and smashed by two terrible volleys from their own comrades. And in the South African campaign a good many blunders were committed owing to the fact that the British Colonial troops wore the same kind of dress as the Boers.

But what is one man's meat is another man's poison; and conversely, what is one man's blunder is another man's safety. The Boer commandoes got away in comparative safety.

But there was one commando which did not have the luck of the rest. There was at Chieveley a big Naval gun, and the officer in command of it was on the look-out with his telescope. And he caught sight of a commando of about 500 burghers sitting on their ponies some five miles away, and evidently waiting for the word of command to retire. The Naval gun was presently trained on the spot. She was loaded rapidly, and in a few minutes there descended, as if from the clouds, a huge lyddite shell. It dropped right in the middle of the 500 burghers, and the results were terrible to behold. Pieces of men and horses flew in the air. The ground was littered with corpses, and with men temporarily stunned with the force of the explosion. The uninjured portion of the commando lost its discipline, and every pony was straightway urged at full speed on the line of retreat.

The fighting was ended for the day. On Green Hill the Fusiliers captured three camps, enormous quantities of stores of all kinds—beds, clothing, bags of rusks, Maxim-Nordenfeldt shells, thousands of rounds of Mauser ammunition, as well as a miscellaneous collection of Bibles, bags containing papers, barrels of apples, and the simple finery of many a Dutch woman.

Monte Cristo was not strongly entrenched. It appears that the Boers never imagined that a mountain so high and so steep could be stormed by our infantry. They had trusted mainly to the natural strength of the place. But they did expect an assault on Green Hill and the nek between it and Monte Cristo. And for a good mile they had constructed

* The French soldiers of that day wore a blue uniform

formidable fortifications. Their trenches were about six feet deep, enabling men to stand up in them and still to be protected from rifle and shell fire. These trenches were mostly filled with straw, and it appeared as though the Boers had slept in them. Altogether it was a position of enormous strength, and it is extremely doubtful if it could have been taken had not Hildyard's brigade threatened the rear of it by capturing Monte Cristo.

Quite early in the afternoon heavy rains, like a Scotch mist, fell, putting a stop to hostilities for the time, or it is more than likely that Buller would have led his troops, flushed with victory, to the conquest of Hlangwane. But the downpour made all further movement impossible. So the troops bivouacked on the ground that they had won.

Thus, on this Sunday, the day when Kitchener and Kelly-Kenny were hurling their battalions at Cronje's laager in the Modder River, the army of Natal was lying down in the rain, sleeping the restless sleep of men who had done great things. They had captured two miles of entrenchments and fortified positions. They had made it possible to raise the siege of Ladysmith. And, their courage being at last guided by sound tactics, they had accomplished these great results at the loss of less than 200 killed and wounded.

Hildyard's lads, especially the West Surreys and the West Yorkshires, had borne the chiefest part of the loss. But they had also gained the chiefest share of the glory, and they never grudged the price they paid.

SIX-INCH SIEGE GUNS MOUNTED ON RAILWAY CARRIAGES.

CHAPTER LVIII

THE RELIEF OF LADYSMITH—THE SECOND ACT.

ON the morning following the capture of Monte Cristo, Buller was early abroad. He proceeded first to Green Hill, whence he reconnoitred through his telescope the height of Hlangwane, to see whether he ought to attack it and how.

All night a sniping fire had been dropping on Green Hill from the main height, and thus it was evident that Botha had not abandoned Hlangwane. But it turned out to be as Buller had thought. Monte Cristo was the key of Green Hill, and Green Hill was the key of Hlangwane. Wherefore Buller ordered that guns should at once be taken up Green Hill in order to thoroughly search the upper slopes and summit of Hlangwane until such time as it became advisable to launch the infantry against it.

For hours the Naval 12-pounders and the bigger guns from Chieveley were trained on the last remaining Boer position on that side, and after shelling the kopje the whole day, the British general ordered an infantry attack late in the afternoon. The Boers, however, did not intend to make any very stubborn resistance. They had already recognised the strength of the positions they had lost the day before, and had sent away their artillery to the other side of the river. They did, indeed, leave a few riflemen to keep up a rear-guard action, so as to give them time to take their guns over.

So it came to pass that when two battalions of infantry went swinging up the side of the coveted hill they met with no resistance. Immediately the attack had begun to develop, Botha's rear-guard, having gained sufficient time to ensure the safety of their guns, evacuated the hill and bolted to some kopjes much nearer to the river. And in this way Buller took Hlangwane without loss so far as the actual capture of the hill itself went. But it must be remembered that the battle of the day before, though its immediate object was the taking of Monte Cristo and Green

Hill, had for its ultimate object the capture of Hlangwane.

One wonders what General Buller thought when at last he stood amongst the Boer entrenchments on the top of this commanding eminence. For what he saw must have told him that here was the key of the Colenso position. An army holding this hill with artillery could make it absolutely impossible for an enemy to hold that terrible line of kopjes known as Fort Wylie, and, still more, could make it impossible for them to hold the township of Colenso. And this was the hill that he had attacked in December, not seriously, but merely in order to keep the Boer left wing occupied. You will remember, in the account given in these pages of the battle of Colenso, how Dundonald's Colonial troopers had scaled three-fourths of the slope of Hlangwane, and were within easy distance of capturing the hill altogether, when they were recalled from the attack by an order from headquarters. Had they been allowed to take the hill that day its value would have been apparent at once, and the British army of Natal would have been saved two months of fighting, two months of bloodshed and hardship; and, what is more important, the garrison of Ladysmith would have been spared two months of semi-starvation.

Three thousand yards east of Hlangwane lay the little town of Colenso, with its little bridge of five spans; and on the other side the British general could see the kopjes of Fort Wylie and their tremendous fortifications. But he could now look upon that fortress without dread. You remember how the pilgrim Christian, being cast into the dungeon of the Giant Despair, suddenly awoke to life and joy. "I have a key in my breast called Promise." And with that key he unlocked the doors of the dungeon, rendering the massive doors and the strong locks of no effect.

So Sir Redvers Buller, after fighting and marching daily from the 11th of January to the 19th of February, after crossing and recrossing the Tugela, after marching and counter-marching, after capturing positions only to find them useless or worse than useless, suddenly found that he held the key that would unlock the dark and deadly road to Ladysmith.

Not that the fighting was all over yet by any means. There were between the British relieving force and the British sitting under the frown of Bulwhana Hill ridges and kopjes, dongas and ragged slopes, every one of which would have to be fought for, and paid for at a heavy price of life and limb, of blood and valour.

With the capture of Hlangwane, operations ended that night of the 19th, and it will now, perhaps, be a good opportunity to show how the forces stood.

You remember that at this point the Tugela, which ordinarily flows east and west, runs north and south. The north and south part of the stream extends from a point a little to the east of Colenso to some rapids about four miles higher up. Then the stream runs from west to east again, forming almost a right angle. If you stand on Hlangwane, which is on the east side of the north to south part of the river, and, looking due west, you have immediately opposite to you some kopjes, which we have called, for convenience, Fort Wylie. Between you and it is the river, and on that side of the river nearer to Fort Wylie is the main railway line. This line runs across the bridge at Colenso, follows pretty much the course of the river where the river runs north and south, and the first station after Colenso is called Pieters station. Pieters station is at the

foot of a high hill called Pieters Hill. And Pieters Hill is the easternmost of a tremendous range of hills stretching westward to Brakfontein Ridge. About half way is Grobler's Kloof—a long kopje-covered ridge immediately opposite the drift at Colenso. It was obvious that after Fort Wylie had been disposed of, the Boers had a position ready made for them by Nature in that range of hills reaching from Pieters Hill to Grobler's Kloof.

It occurred to many people that General Buller might have avoided this position altogether—might have skirted it, leaving it on his left, by the simple process of marching due north from Monte Cristo, crossing the Tugela where it again runs east and west, and enter Ladysmith from the east of the railway. The great obstacle to this course was the absence of roads. And as it was absolutely necessary for the accomplishment of Buller's object that he should take a considerable amount of food with him to feed the starving people of Ladysmith, it seemed necessary that he should stick to a road.

The British held ground commanding the whole of the country on both sides of the river, where it runs north and south. Our left rested on Hussar Hill, held by the Lancashire Brigade. Hart's brigade, with the composite rifle battalions, was at Chieveley, prepared to render a good account of itself if the Boers should by any chance resolve upon a counter-stroke. Such a counter-stroke might have been effectually dealt if Botha could have thrown his main body across the Tugela at Colenso, defeated the British at Chieveley, and worked round so as to outflank Hussar Hill. No such counter-stroke was even attempted—another instance, perhaps, of the want of initiative amongst the Boer commandants.

But, perhaps, there was another reason by which Botha could explain both the feebleness of his defence of the Hlangwane position, and his failure to hit back. It must be remembered that the Boers were a sitting army. And by this time (February 19th) news had percolated through from the Free State of the relief of Kimberley, the flight of Cronje, his imminent peril, and the march of Lord Roberts towards Bloemfontein. The result of these tidings was to cause three or four thousand Free State burghers to demand to be sent back to fight in and for the defence of their own country. No persuasions could induce them, no compulsion force them, to remain, and they went post haste by train to Ladybrand, and thence marched to Paardeberg to attempt the relief of the Fighting General. You have already read of certain commandoes hovering in the neighbourhood of Paardeberg Drift between the 19th and the 25th of February. These were the men who had formerly opposed Buller's advance.

On the 20th, the day after the capture of Hlangwane, Thorneycroft's irregulars put themselves in motion from Chieveley Camp, whither they had arrived the night before. They went to see how matters stood at Colenso. The report they brought in was satisfactory. The Boers had almost, if not quite, abandoned the place; and no sooner did General Hart hear this, than he had his brigade under arms and marched to take possession.

It was true enough. The Boers, recognising the strength of Buller's new position, recognising that Colenso was now untenable by reason of the big guns that were being placed in position on Hlangwane, evacuated the town and retired across the bridge. But they did

"THEY PLIED THE STEEL" (*p.* 688).

not go without committing as much damage as they could. When the Dublin Fusiliers, the first of the British infantry to enter Colenso, once more found themselves in the town that they had so reluctantly abandoned in November, they could hardly recognise it. There was not a whole pane of glass in the town. The Boers had camped in the houses and shops, and had smashed everything breakable and defaced everything else.

It is impossible to tell in these pages everything that they had done in the houses of the people of Colenso. Suffice it to say that their purposeless profanation of the dwellings of civilians and their wanton acts of destruction went far to remove any sympathy that had been felt for them in the British Empire. Not even the French soldiers of the Republic and the First Empire, whose avowed policy it was to live on the country, ever committed such gross and wanton acts of desecration and spoil.

In addition to this wicked and unnecessary damage, the Dutchmen had blown up every one of the five spans of the Colenso railway bridge, and had destroyed one of the stone piers. But this, of course, was quite justifiable, being merely a military precaution to harass the enemy by causing him delay.

While the Irish Brigade was taking possession of Colenso and overflowing on to the kopjes beyond on the south bank of the Tugela, Buller was moving the greater part of the army down from the captured hills closer to the river. Any movement by a large body of troops is bound to be slow—the larger the force the slower the progress. Thus it came about that not until late in the afternoon was the infantry spread along the river-bank.

"What's this?" The speaker was one of the Irish infantry, one of a line of skirmishers who had been sent out to investigate the ground to the east of Colenso village, to see whether the Dutchmen had really gone or no. General Hart wanted no "snipers" lying concealed in the dongas by the river.

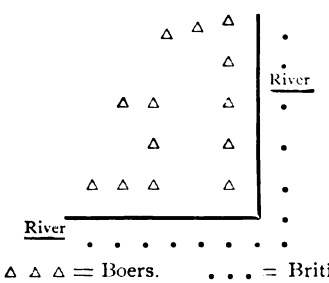
"This" was a ghastly sight. The skeletons of many horses—their bones picked clean. There is still harness on the poor brutes. "See!" And someone points to a number on a buckle. The skeletons are those of the unfortunate beasts of Long's lost batteries, left there to rot just as they fell. The sight does not improve the temper of the gentle Irishmen—reminder as it is of bitter defeat, and of the prime cause of that defeat. And they mutter softly to themselves.

Steady! brave lads. You have been shot at by shell and bullet, killed and maimed without much chance to deal a blow in return. Your fine battalions, how different now from the splendid forces of three months ago. Steady, there! for your day of supremest glory, of supremest vengeance, is at hand. Your thin and scanty line shall do deeds at which the world shall marvel. Steady!

The sappers and the gunners, both naval and military, drag guns all day from Hussar Hill to Hlangwane, and these find positions meet for the shelling of Grobler's Kloof and Fort Wylie. A field battery or two went down in the morning to certain dongas by the river; and, unlimbering, have been throwing shrapnel amongst the kopjes and the entrenchments on the other side. The harm they did to the enemy was not much, but every little helps. And from Chieveley there has been a strenuous outpouring of lyddite all

day—as, indeed, there has been for five days past. Late in the day a few big guns on Hlangwane are ready, and they waste no time in useless preliminaries. Fort Wylie is to be enfiladed. Very well—let us enfilade it now and have done with it.

The infantry, as each company and battalion takes up its allotted position near the river on the British side, finds itself within shot of certain Boers on the farther side. These Dutchmen are as slim as South African Dutchmen usually are. But for once in a way they find themselves at a disadvantage in the important matter of position. For the British riflemen are firing from two sides, the south and the east, and the Boers find themselves enfiladed. Roughly, this was how the combatants stood :—



So that the British fire was concentrated, while the Boer fire was diffused.

It must not be imagined that the dragging of the guns up Hlangwane, the occupation of Colenso, and the spreading of the infantry round the angle of the river, was accomplished peaceably. Far from it.

True there was no assault, no pitched battle, no volleying, no fixing of bayonets. But there was fighting all the same. Long-range fighting it was—the kind of fighting when the Boer marksmen scanned the ground to south and east of them through their field-glasses, and fired sporting shots at 2,600 yards. And a Ranger would feel a pain in his shoulder. Hit by a bullet coming from nowhere—apparently. And a Fusilier would groan with pain and curse with annoyance—one through the leg this time. An unkempt fellow, distant a mile and a half, brings down his glasses and says to another ragged-looking brown man, "I think you hit him that time, Piet."

Naturally, the sniping was not all on one side. The 60th had some sharpshooters, and the Queen's, and a few other battalions here and there. And these took a little toll. For they had become used to the light now, and were shooting on the top of their form.

Besides the sniping, our men had to bear the brunt of a Maxim-Nordenfeldt and a field gun on Fort Wylie, and some heavier pieces mounted on Grobler's Kloof, and these were being particularly well served.

So that there was plenty of work and plenty of danger—fighting all day, and the risk of being killed in your sleep at night by some sniper on the other side of the river.

After some of the guns on Hlangwane and the big fellows at Chieveley had pounded Fort Wylie and the fortified kopjes near it—being the first group of kopjes north of the river—the fire of the enemy slackened somewhat. So much so, that Sir Redvers Buller thought the position had been abandoned except by a small rearguard. So, too, thought other British officers. And it occurred to that first-class fighting man, Colonel Thorneycroft, that it would be a good move to lead his hard regiment across the river, drive out that rearguard, and occupy Fort Wylie straightway. Thus we could press hard on the heels of the retreating Dutchmen.

Off to Buller to ask permission. Ford the river? Of course we can. And presently the war-worn troopers of Thorneycroft's Horse, veterans now—if half a hundred skirmishes and four hard-fought battles make veterans—joyfully obey the order to ford the Tugela. They have found a fordable drift hard by Colenso, and away they splash into the water. Thorneycroft's Horse in those days recalled the description given by the Duke of Wellington of the old 50th Foot, "The Dirty Half Hundred"—"Not very good-looking; but a d——d tough lot of fighters." So Thorneycroft's men, as they rode into the turgid waters of the Tugela—every man in his shirtsleeves, and not too much either of shirt or sleeve—with tattered breeches, muddy and greasy—faces embrowned and grimy—did not look like a birthday parade. Yet to the eye of every soldier who had seen other than drawing-room service, this regiment seemed a perfect instrument of war.

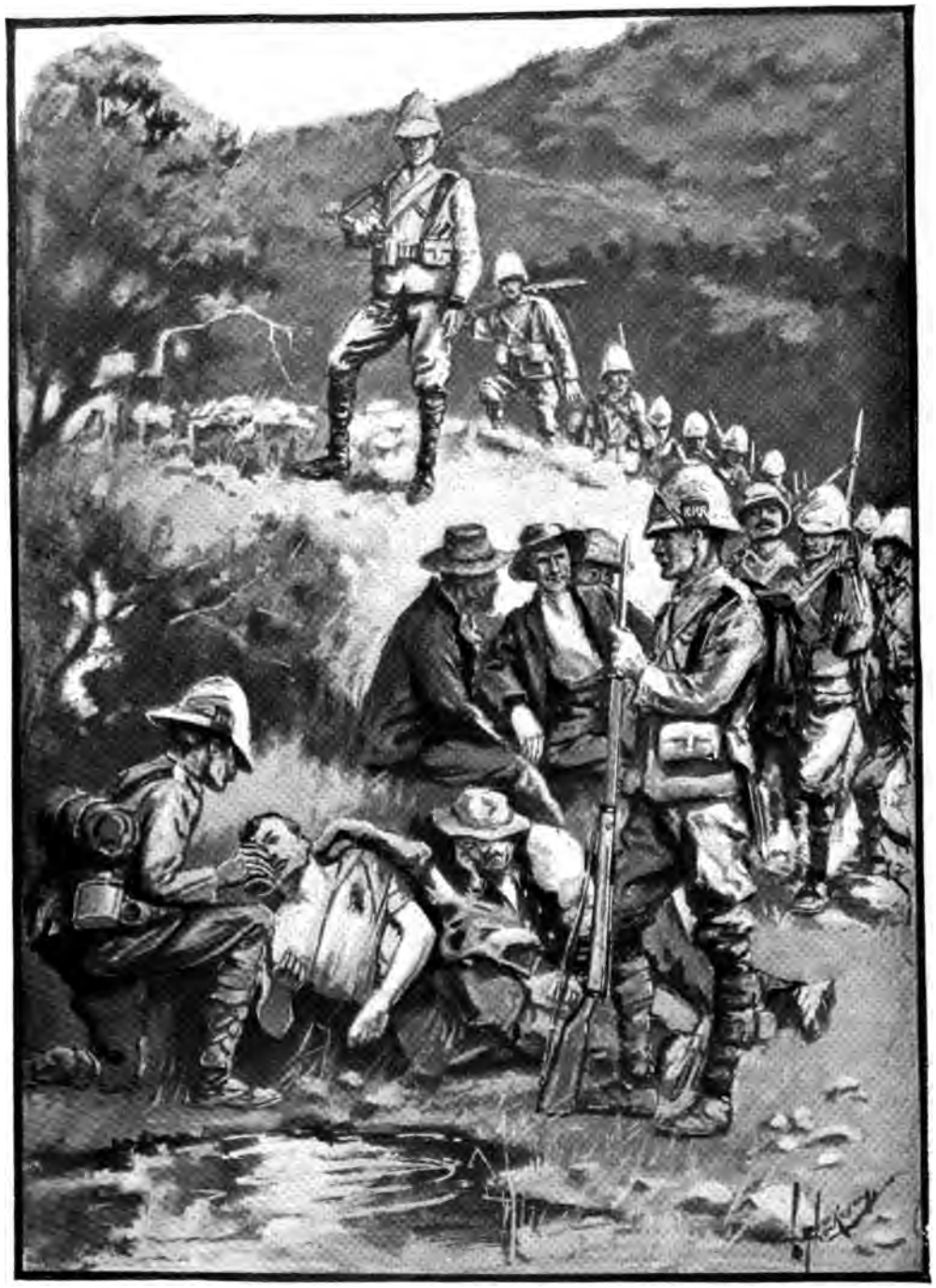
It was no small honour to them and their resourceful leader, to send them first across the river. But they deserved it. In all the campaign, especially during the operation now in progress, they had worked tirelessly and fearlessly. So to them was accorded the stern honour of being first across the Tugela at Colenso.

Over they go, splashing through the water, laughing boisterously at nothing, as men do when they are elated. Men out to the front and flanks. What's that? Boers in the trenches ahead? Here, my lads, dismount. Stow the horses. Cautiously. I wonder if this is a rearguard after all—or have the Dutchies been lying low?

Suddenly a trooper disappears in the depth of the stream. A bullet has struck his horse and down it goes. The man comes to the surface hatless and panting, but more angry than hurt; and as he strikes out for the other side his language, if one may quote an American author, is "painful and frequent and free." Ere long the whole regiment is across the river. Scouts out to the right. Scouts out to the left. It will not do to ride straight on past places where marksmen may be concealed. One never knows when these Dutchmen will allow us to ride past and then catch us in the rear. A fringe of scouts in the shape of a fan covers the advance, clearing out a solitary marksman here and there from a bush or a boulder.

The trenches and the redoubts of the Fort Wylie kopjes are ominously and sullenly silent. Forward, Thorneycroft's Horse! And they ride straight for the front. Two thousand yards, and not a shot from Fort Wylie. Fifteen hundred yards—still not a shot. Are there no Boers there at all? Twelve hundred yards—from a trench far on the left, comes the feminine cackle of a Mauser rifle; almost at the same instant another from the centre; then a third from the left. This is ominous; for well our men know the meaning of those single shots. Three of the best marksmen in the trenches are finding the distance for their fellows. When they have found it, look out.

Without undue deliberation, Thorneycroft's men throw themselves from their horses and fall flat. They are but just in time—then comes the storm. Suddenly the Fort Wylie hills break out into a Handelian chorus of musketry. The sharp, thin report of Mausers is mixed with the heavier tones of Martinis and the bass of sporting guns. For a few yards the dismounted troopers wriggle along on their bellies and fire at the parapet. You might as well try to hit the shadow of a blade of



BOER WOUNDED LEFT BEHIND ON GREEN HILL.

grass as to hit a Boer when he has cover like that. Had the ground been all rough and irregular, it is very probable that the "good, hard fighting man" and the sunburnt crew behind him would have stormed the fortifications and slept that night in the Boer shelter trenches. But the Dutchmen, thanks to their own native ingenuity, as well as the instruction of European engineers, had constructed a smooth and gradual ascent to their stronghold, and to lead men across such ground would be murder. So Thorneycroft here had to be content to lie down at the foot of the fortifications and fire at the invisible enemy. The Dutchmen, on their part, returned the fusillade with compound interest.

For an hour or two the unequal contest raged, and had not the irregulars been men of war craft of no mean order, they must have lost heavily. As it was, one or two bodies were carried to the rear, and there were one or two gaps in the ranks of Thorneycroft's men. It was no good lying there. Except at enormous sacrifice, it would be utterly impossible to storm Fort Wylie in the face of an enemy strong and determined. So, reluctantly and sadly, the Colonials crawled back to their horses, mounted, and rode back in small parties out of range of rifle fire, and, to their own intense disgust, were obliged to ford the river again and return to the south bank.

The problem for General Buller now was how and where he should cross the Tugela. He might have crossed beyond the second bend of the river, and so have been near to Ladysmith. But, as we have said, he was deterred from this course by the absence of roads. He now made up his mind that he would bridge the Tugela near to Colenso, but round the bend; that is, almost in a line with Hlangwane. Tuesday, the 20th of February, therefore, found the British in occupation of Colenso, with never a Boer on the right hand bank of the river; and with the Boers holding the ridge of kopjes from Grobler's Kloof to Pieters Hill, and also the Fort Wylie fortifications and a number of kopjes on the left bank of the river in advance of the ridge first mentioned.

As soon as it was daylight on Wednesday (February 21st), Sir Redvers Buller suddenly ordered the pontoon section of the Royal Engineers to advance to a point opposite Hlangwane and throw a bridge over. This operation did not take long, though there was some sniping at the Sappers while it was in progress.

The first thing to be done was to capture the kopjes on the left hand side of the river nearer to Hlangwane than Fort Wylie. These kopjes were not entrenched, but were naturally strong, and afforded considerable protection for riflemen.

General Buller proposed to march along the bank of the river where it runs north and south up to Pieters Station, clearing the road, if necessary, foot by foot. By clinging to the river he would secure that vital necessity—drinking-water for the troops.

During the night the Somerset, Dorset, and Middlesex Regiments had moved to the river, and these hurried across the pontoon bridge at the double. On their heels went a field battery; and Thorneycroft's Horse once more forded the drift at Colenso and opened fire upon Fort Wylie.

The Boers had received considerable reinforcements since the previous day, for they had left only a containing force at Ladysmith, and had brought about 5,000 men south to meet Buller. The reinforcements lined Grobler's Kloof, and from it

and from Fort Wylie they shelled the three battalions heavily. There was no replying with any effect, and besides the immediate objective of the British forces was the ground in front of Grobler's Kloof. The Somerset and Dorset and Middlesex Regiments hastened and spread themselves out so as to cover the ground along the left bank of the river. The field battery that had crossed with them dropped shrapnel here and there amongst the Boers, but instead of shelling Grobler's Kloof the field gunners devoted their attention to the marksmen who invested the broken ground nearer the river.

Then Sir Redvers Buller marched the whole of the 5th Division across the pontoon bridge. Hildyard's brigade spread out to the left opposite Fort Wylie, and Wynne's Lancashire brigade next to them joining them to Talbot-Coke's brigade. The British guns were now thoroughly in position on Hlangwane, and for hours there was a din that could properly be called infernal. Shell after shell sped over the valley and dropped in Fort Wylie and Grobler's Kloof. The three brigades of infantry were firing as fast as they could load, while the shells of their friends whizzed over their heads and the missiles of their enemies dropped around and amongst them. Hildyard was advancing on Fort Wylie at a crawl. This is intended to be taken literally. His men did actually crawl for at least a mile. They were broiled by the sun. The dust choked them. They were athirst with a horrible thirst, as of men who had worked in a lime kiln. Yet they patiently crawled nearer and ever nearer.

The tons of lyddite that had been dropped into their trenches somewhat quenched the fierceness of the Boer musketry. The brigade of General Talbot-Coke had now established themselves on some kopjes near the river on the left of Fort Wylie, and, creeping nearer and nearer, were beginning to get a sight of the enemy and to enfilade the trenches to some purpose. The Queen's and West Yorkshires, rivals and brothers in arms, offered to take Fort Wylie at the point of the bayonet. Hildyard was compelled reluctantly to refuse the offer. He greatly disliked damping the ardour of his soldiers, but he could not allow them to throw their lives away for any good result. Soon the enfilading musketry fire of the Somersets, Middlesex, and Dorsets took effect, and at four o'clock in the afternoon the Boers a' andoned Fort Wylie and evacuated the trenches there under a tremendous cannonade. Hildyard's brigade promptly occupied the evacuated position ; and, with the occupation by Talbot-Coke's brigade of many of the kopjes near the river, the British felt that they had advanced somewhat on their road.

There now remained nothing but to clear the ground up to the ridge of which we have spoken. Then to pierce that ridge. And then to Ladysmith.

CHAPTER LIX

THE RELIEF OF LADYSMITH—THE THIRD ACT.

THE eighth day of the fighting dawned. Hitherto about 400 men had been lost in killed and wounded. And the British had driven the enemy out of their first line of strong positions.

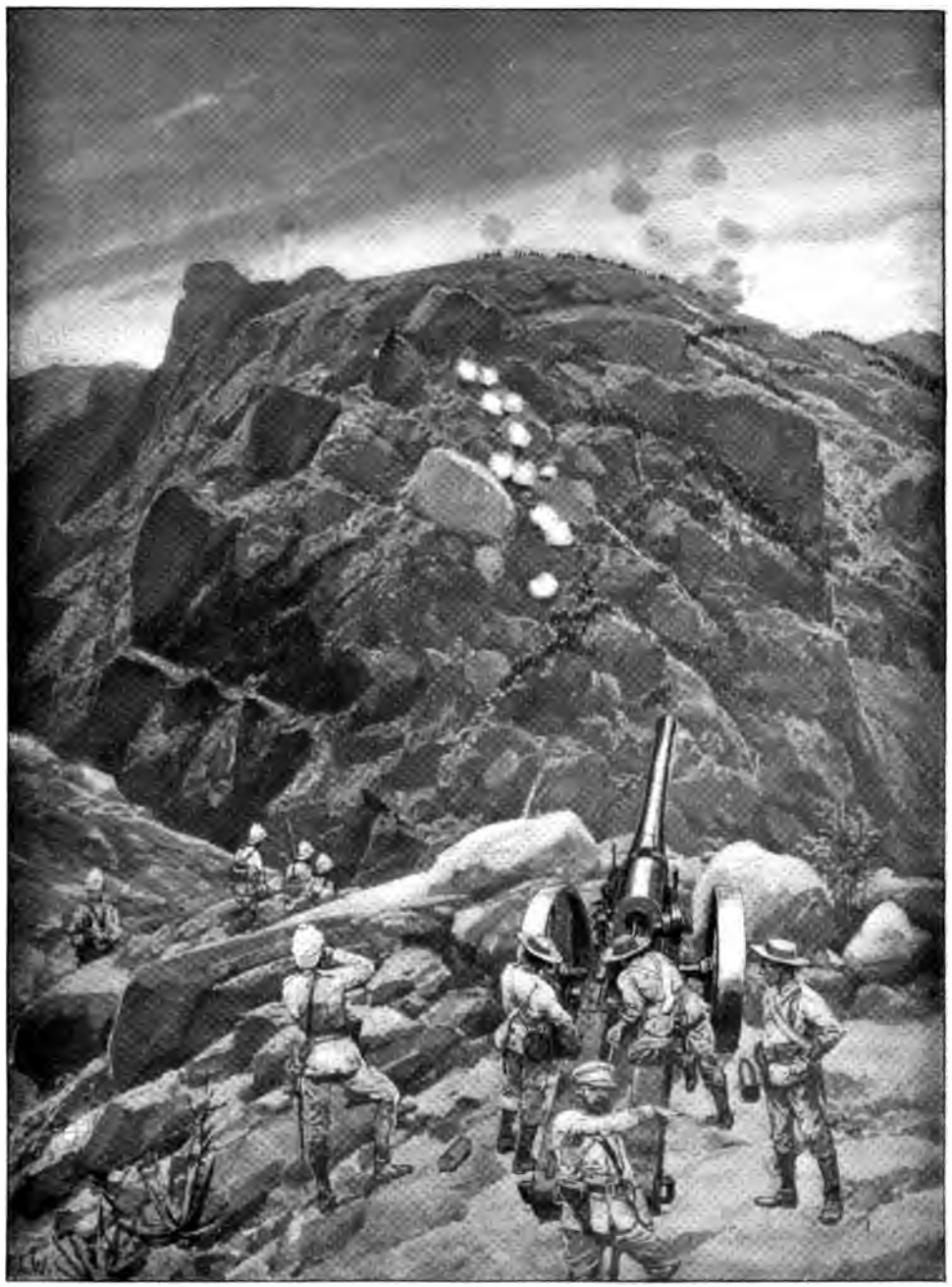
Now they must move forward towards the second ridge of kopjes. And first, Talbot-Coke's brigade, with the Somersets leading, and the Lancashire brigade on the left, moved north. Hart's brigade, which had been at Colenso, clamoured to join in the fighting, and Buller had to promise the Irishmen that to them should be given the task of storming Grobler's Kloof.

At about 9 a.m. the whole of the British artillery actively bombarded Grobler's Kloof and the kopjes in front, and just before noon Talbot-Coke led his men forward. The Somerset Light Infantry were in the van, and speedily found the enemy on some strong but unfortified kopjes close to the river immediately in their front. There were hours of skirmishing, the men advancing in sections and half-sections, storming the hills boulder by boulder and bush by bush. In view of the enormous force at Buller's command, it may be thought curious that he did not at once push forward his men and overwhelm the enemy. But those who imagine that such tactics would have been likely to succeed, forget that every fairly good shot, with plenty of cover, acting on the defensive, ought to be able to account for a dozen men acting against him on the offensive.

A certain soldier who played a part in the war, not altogether undistinguished, said after five months' campaigning that he himself was never afraid of riding out to scout alone. He felt quite sure that so long as he had a magazine rifle he could not be captured by anything less than twenty Boers. It is only reasonable if you think of it. For a magazine rifle can be fired ten times in a minute, and will kill at 2,500 yards. The man acting on the defensive can select his cover and stay there, while the men on the offensive are bound to expose themselves more or less as they advance. The only essential for the man on the defensive is that he shall keep perfectly cool. And there can be little doubt that if the Boers had always kept quite cool and had never lost nerve when they saw the bayonets coming, that they might have defied the British or any other army until the end of time.

The whole army moved forward on the 22nd. But such a stout fight did the Dutchmen make all day, so difficult was the ground, such plenty of protection did it afford for marksmen, that in the day they did not gain more than about two miles. The Somersets, supported by the Dorsets and the Middlesex Regiment, bore the brunt of the early fighting. There was no battle, as one understands the word battle. Instead, there was a desultory, harassing, deadly skirmish, or series of skirmishes, lasting about nine hours.

The lyddite of the heavy guns searched



THE NAVAL GUNS ATTACKING GROBLER'S KLOOF.

the kopjes, the shells whirring over the heads of the Somerset Light Infantry, and at the end of nine hours' continual shelling and rifle fire, and crawling and creeping, the Somerset Light Infantry found that they had cleared their front and driven the enemy about a mile further north. This brought Talbot-Coke's division up to the base of Grobler's Kloof. Some 200 men had been left on the way, the victims of an expensive mode of fighting. Had the Dutchmen kept thoroughly cool, had they not been demoralised slightly by the bursting of shells amongst them and the steady advance of the Somerset men, the whole brigade might have been wiped out.

At 2 p.m. Wynne set his brigade in motion. They had been massed under the shelter of the ridges on the left of Fort Wylie, and they marched round to the north and deployed in open order. They had been broiling under arms all day, and were glad enough to be put on the move. The Royal Lancasters were the first line, followed by the South Lancashire battalion, and supported by the other two battalions of the Lancashire brigade.

As soon as these fine regiments, burning with the desire to avenge Spion Kop, deployed in the open, they became the target of the Boer artillery on Grobler's Kloof. There were Krupp guns and Maxim-Nordenfeldts and pom-poms, one and all casting lead with surprising accuracy and venom. Some of the British guns turned their attention to this part of the field, and endeavoured, by a furious cannonade, to silence the Boer artillery. To no purpose. The Boer guns were so well concealed that our gunners could not find them, and the Lancashire brigade had to march forward under a sickening shower of leaden death. They took it, however, with the greatest unconcern. They marched in a great loosely knit mass straight on towards a kopje they had been sent to capture. Across the valley, over a low ridge, down on the other side, and across another valley—all the time under such a fire as might have disconcerted the most veteran troops.

Then the Lancashire lads were ordered to lie down and fire at the position they were to assault. Unfortunately no fresh supply of cartridges had been served out to them, so that in a little time they had run out of ammunition. So their officers led them to cover, and they lay down and waited for more cartridges. While lying there, listening to the shrieking of the shells that flew over their heads, the Lancashire men heard the tramping of feet behind them. Looking round they saw a sight that made them rejoice greatly. Norcott had put his brigade in motion, and the 60th Rifles marched to the help of the Lancashires. They brought cartridges with them to replenish the empty pouches of the Lancashire Brigade. Wherefore General Wynne took his men out of cover again and resumed his attack. It was four o'clock when the leading battalions of Norcott's and Wynne's brigades reached the foot of the last kopje between themselves and Grobler's Kloof. They crept up a little way, firing as they crept. The air was now alive with the rattle and the shrill whistle of the musketry. But the 60th and the Royal Lancasters pressed on steadily and boldly until they were lying on the slope within 100 yards of the summit.

They must have been there nearly twenty minutes, wondering what on earth the officers were doing holding them

back in this fashion ere the signal was given to advance. Then a whistle blew. The Royal Lancasters were up in a flash and racing for the summit. Another whistle. And the 60th were getting in with the bayonet. Until that moment the advance had been quiet, almost dumb. But when the British infantry saw how near was the summit of the hill; when they knew that the fire was becoming wilder and wilder every minute; when they recollected that behind those boulders on the flat top of the kopje were some of the men who had been sniping at them for eight days without ceasing—they gave forth a yell of derision and defiance such as the Dutchmen had never heard before.

Have you ever stood by the seashore and watched a wave as it rolls in a straight, lazy line from the ocean? Have you seen how, as it nears the beach, it suddenly raises its crest, and sweeping forward with quicker motion, dashes resistless upon the rocks and sands? Thus the British battalions, marching upon the hill in quiet, unbroken line, suddenly, at the signal, flew forward at the foe with a noise like the breakers by the shore.

SCOUTS QUESTIONING NATIVES.

It was resistless. The Boers broke and fled for dear life. Yet this was the very time, when by remaining perfectly cool

and steady, they might have dealt out death to the British and slain eight men out of every ten. But they did not remain perfectly cool. The last valorous rush, the last defiant cheer, played havoc with their nerves. Somewhere before we have said that, despite armament and position, valour still wins battles. In all probability valour will always win battles until the day of the millennium. As the Royal Lancasters, the first to breast the crest of the kopje, reached the heaps of stones where the enemy had been they saw that enemy running and riding with all the haste of mortal terror to the kloof in the rear.

The little, lithe, fair-haired soldier boys could have wept for rage and disappointment. "It is always so," they said; "we charge for a mile and they pot us from behind rocks, and then when we come near enough to do some real fighting they run away." And you will never persuade a Royal Lancaster private to believe that the Boer is anything but a cowardly dog. He (the Lancastrian) regards the tactics of the burghers as equal to the conduct of the small boy who hurls stones at his enemy from a distance, but who declines to wait and have it out with his fists. Which all the world knows to be the brand of Cain.

Night fell with the Somersets in possession of their dearly-won kopjes in front of Grobler's Kloof, and the Lancashire Brigade (now commanded by Colonel Kitchener *vice* Wynne, wounded) holding the kopjes near Ondersbrook Spruit. Again the casualties numbered about 200; and again the weary soldiers bivouacked under the sky. The Somersets and the Royal Lancasters, who had stormed these positions, were relieved in the night in face of a furious bombardment from Grobler's Kloof; for all that night the Boer gunners kept it up. They had the range to a nicety, and for hour after hour poured into the sleeping infantry a ceaseless rain of shells. "Sleeping infantry?" say you. Yes. Bullets might fall around them, shells burst over them, but the British infantry slept 'mid all.

And on the morrow, at earliest dawn, every man within range set to work again, sniping at the enemy. This (23rd February) was the tenth day of the advance, and all that time the stubborn foes had been fighting with cannon and rifle and bayonet; never resting. One side, foot by foot, yard by yard, pushing forward, leaving a man for every five yards of ground gained; the other slowly and sullenly yielding before the attack, making their assailants buy with blood and life and sweat every kopje and every donga, every boulder and every bush.

But in the night other brigades had been at work. The night was not dark, and in the half light two magnificent columns were pushing on. One was the fiery command of General Hart; the other, the steadfast brigade of General Hildyard.

The Irishmen had been grumbling; and the cause was characteristic. Hardships of all kinds, wounds and death, hunger and thirst, brought never a murmur to their lips. A march over rocky ground in soleless boots did not trouble them. A bivouac on sodden ground worried them not in the least. And the gossamer texture of their rags—once a uniform—was but the subject of merriment. But one thing the Irish Brigade would not submit to, and that was being kept out of the van when fighting was on hand. They had promised to go through Blake's "Irish" Brigade as the Devil went through

Athlone,* and they meant to do it sooner or later.

Now, there was jutting out from the Grobler's Kloof range a spur, called by our men "Railway Hill," a steep and difficult eminence that blocked the way to Pieters Station. This was strongly held by the enemy, and was considerably fortified. From it, indeed, proceeded the greater part of the firing that annoyed our men on Wednesday; for Railway Hill was high as well as steep, and was a splendid position for artillery. The irrepressible Irishmen petitioned to be allowed to storm it. And he had three bullets in various parts of him—one received at the foot of the hill, and two nearly at the top.

The Irish Brigade marched towards Railway Hill, forming the right of the advance, and far on their left the English Brigade advanced, forming the centre. A watercourse divided the two. Immediately on Hildyard's left came the 60th Rifles, of Norcott's brigade, forming the left attack; and the 7th Royal Fusiliers (City of London), spread out a little more to the left again, but somewhat in the rear, covered the flank, guarding it from any

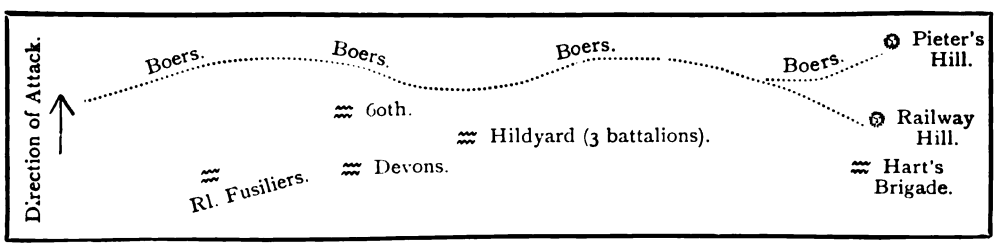


DIAGRAM SHOWING THE DISPOSITION OF THE BRIGADES.

Hart, their own "No-Bobs" Hart,† backed their request, until General Buller, not very reluctantly, gave his consent. He had intended to save the gallant sons of Old Erin for the final dash. Nevertheless, since they wished it, he permitted them to sharpen their teeth on the entrenchments and sangars of Railway Hill.

And a very pretty bit of fighting it was. At least, so said one of the men who was in it. He ought to have known, because attempt by the enemy to get round. The diagram above will give a fair idea of the disposition of the troops.

Let us leave Hart's brigade for a time, merely remembering that they were pushing on slowly in the gloaming, and follow the fortunes of the English Brigade and their companions, whom stern work awaited.

The 60th marched as the leading battalion—meaning by that the battalion from whom the rest took the time and direction of advance. Behind them trudged the Devons. On the right, slightly behind the K.R.R., strode the Queen's West Surreys and the East Surreys, while the West Yorks were slightly in the rear acting as supports.

Immediately ahead of the 60th was a

* For the information of the curious, it may be said that his Satanic Majesty went through Athlone in standing jumps.

† General Hart was called "No-Bobs" by his men because he never "ducked," or "bobbed," when a shell came whistling near. Nor did he allow his men to "bob" if he could help it.

hill, one of the usual flat-topped hills common in these parts, whose crest was just visible in the faint light. Very early in the day there had been firing from this plateau, but the firing had died away towards afternoon; and it was supposed that the enemy had abandoned it, and had retired on the main fortifications of Grobler's Kloof. The 60th had been ordered to occupy this hill, place pickets there, and hold it to cover the general advance.

Straight on the hill marched the famous Riflemen. It was a weird performance, walking across such country at such an hour. Up a slight incline, down another, across a valley; and then the leading company, under Captain Cathcart, started to climb the hill itself. It was tiring work, but the 60th strode manfully forward, breasting the slope in good order. "Nearly at the top, now, boys; and then for the welcome bivouac."

When suddenly, from about fifty yards above and ahead of them, a smart volley swept the ranks of the leading company. No orders were needed. The company fixed bayonets in a twinkling, changed their "Quick" into a "Double," and charged.

Cathcart's voice rang out, "Into them, my lads!" A hoarse, vengeful cheer; a groan as a man fell on the stone; a scream, "*Allemachtige!*" as a bayonet did its bloody work; a wild shot as a burgher emptied his rifle. Cathcart's men were in the trench, and the slaying mood was on them.

The burghers turned and fled—fled before the fierce onslaught and the bloody steel. And, like tigers, the 60th pursued. The fugitives ran helter-skelter across the plateau; Cathcart's company broke line and followed. But the fear of death was swifter than the hope of vengeance; and though here and there a burgher rolled over, bleeding from gashes in back and front, the greater part made good their escape.

So greedy of vengeance were the British infantry that they pursued still, when—from a second trench in the middle of the plateau, a trench not visible in that half light until one was nearly into it, there poured a devastating torrent of lead. Down dropped Cathcart, riddled, and the company lacked its captain. Down dropped a lieutenant, down dropped many a stalwart soldier, many a hardy fighter.

And the rest of the company, dismayed by the sudden check, turned and ran for a few yards, then threw themselves on the ground, and sought cover.

Cathcart had taken his company along at such a pace that he had left the rest of the column far in the rear; and, indeed, had gone so far ahead as to be invisible to his comrades in the half-light. They had no supports in touch with them to come up and strengthen their firing line, and put new vigour into their attack when they were repulsed.

The rest of the 60th reached the crest of the hill, and, encountering a heavy fire from the trenches farther along the plateau, made for themselves sangars, and began to use their rifles. Cathcart's company was lying between the two fires, and more than one poor wretch escaped the bullets of the farmers' Mausers only to be hit by the Lee-Metfords of his own friends.

The Dutchmen in the second trench, reinforced by those driven out of the first, had plucked up courage and recovered nerve, and with ceaseless activity poured a storm of bullets across the plateau. And

THE LAST CHARGE AT RAILWAY HILL.

here the veldt-bred men had the advantage. In a light that was darkness to the Englishmen the Boers could see well—our men soon found that out. Let a man but show the least bit of limb or body against the skyline, and he found himself very promptly the object of unwelcome attentions.

At last the British discovered the presence of the leading company of the King's Royal Rifles on the ground between themselves and the enemy. With prompt and cheerful devotion two companies of the East Surreys rushed across the firing plateau to support and cover the retreat of Cathcart's men. Terrible were the losses they suffered. In the two companies of the East Surreys and the one of the 60th, fifty men and two officers were killed—an enormous proportion — while many others were severely wounded. Of the latter, the colonel of the East Surreys formed one.

All night the plateau re-echoed to the unceasing fire of musketry, as rifle answered rifle at close quarters. It was terrible, this midnight musketry. The British could only see the indistinct shape of the sangars and trenches ahead, and on these they poured their volleys. They were firing for hours thus. But the invisible enemy could be felt. Nor did any troops in the war undergo a more nerve-trying ordeal than this.

When daylight dawned the firing became still hotter. The men who had struggled forward were officerless now; and, with a want of judgment and nerve that is apt to overtake officerless troops, they started to retire on the main body. Far better for them it would have been to lie where they were, and take the best cover they could find. For, as they exposed themselves, they were cut down by the scythe of the Boer musketry. Some reached their battalions whole and unhurt; but the greater part were left, dead and bleeding, on the plateau.

Daylight showed that the Dutchmen had deserted a line of sangars a little to the right front of our position—fortifications evidently abandoned under hot fire. After a few hours, the general pushed forward two companies of the Queen's and two companies of the Devons to occupy the deserted positions. Here, again, as soon as the men showed out of cover, as they were obliged to do to some extent in order to advance, they were met by a swift and deadly shower of bullets. And it had gone hard with them but for their experience. Fortunately, these two fine battalions had learnt something about cover within the last week, and they were able to manage their advance so skilfully as to lose very few of their number.

It was wonderful to notice how experience had taught them caution. In the early days they would have risen to the word of command and walked forward in extended order with a beautiful alignment, watching their directing flank and correcting their "dressing" with infinite care. Now the sections advanced independently, keeping only the very loosest of order. They advanced crouching and at a quick run until cover was gained, and then, lying down well hidden, opened fire at once, until another section came up to cover their further advance. Oh yes! they had learnt.

Having gained these sangars, the British on the plateau kept up a fire of great power all day. Several times men stood up to charge, and actually gained a few yards. But the fire of the Mausers was so concentrated—so deadly—that every time the bayonets advanced they were driven back.

Lovely dawn became fierce noontide.

Still the rifles cracked on the plateau, till barrels grew hot and shoulders ached. Day faded into twilight, and twilight into darkness. Still trench and sangar answered sangar and trench.

And from rear and front great shells soared, bursting with horrid noise.

And far on the right there rose the noise of strife—a strife even fiercer and more obstinate than the fight for the plateau.

For there the Irish sought death or glory, and attained both.

Let us see.

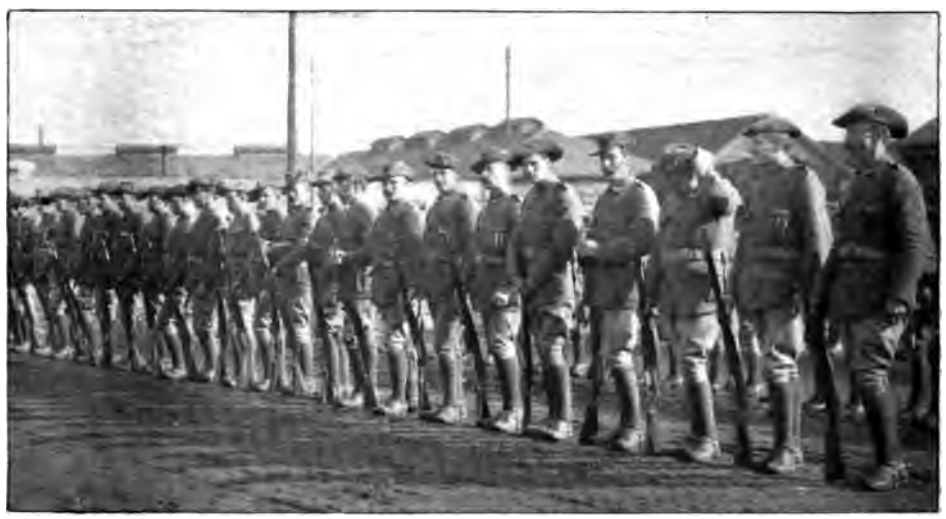


Photo:] [*Gregory & Co., Strand, W.C.*

LORD LOVAT'S SCOUTS.

CHAPTER LX.

THE SIEGE OF MAFEKING (*continued*).

AFTER the attack by the younger Cronje, the siege of Mafeking dragged its way along in a desultory manner for some days. There was, first of all, an armistice for three days, and then the shelling was resumed in full force and effect.

But November was, on the whole, a pretty quiet month, although on the 7th of November the Boers managed to advance their artillery a little nearer the town. But although the 100-pounder continued to shell the place, it was some time before any man fell to it. It was, of course, annoying for the British to be held up in the way they were by artillery so vastly superior to their own both in range and number. For it was, of course, quite hopeless for the 7-pounders of the garrison to attempt to compete with the Creusot or the Boer field gun.

The greatest danger, however, was not from the artillery but from the Mauser bullets, for by this time the Boers had entrenched themselves near enough to reach the town with rifle fire. Of course the members of the garrison, themselves no mean shots, did not allow the sniping to be all on one side. The men of the Protectorate regiment, and of the other forces of the garrison, manned the advanced trenches and took some small toll of the enemy.

The method of warfare was simple and not without excitement. It rather resembled stalking game than civilised warfare. To succeed in the pastime one needed patience, a good eye, and a complete knowledge of the gentle art of taking cover. You might lie seven or eight hours in a trench watching the Boer trench immediately in front of you and never see a single thing to fire at. Then perhaps a slouch hat or a tangle-haired head would appear, as some Boer raised himself above the parapet in order to get a better sight. You then proceeded on the principle which is supposed to guide the combatants in a row in Ireland—"whenever you see a head, hit it." Here, whenever you saw a head you drew trigger and tried to hit it. And the odds against you were considerable, for the target would only be in view, perhaps, for a fractional part of a second. You had, of course, in addition to the excitement, the pleasurable feeling that a scoundrel with a beard like a baker's shovel was in all probability keeping his eye upon you from a loophole opposite, and would inevitably send a bullet there or thereabouts if you showed so much as the tip of your finger.

But this was part of the game. The garrison were prepared to take the risk of it, and were only annoyed because the enemy would not fight out the quarrel in more open fashion. But what was not in the game was the shelling of the women's quarter, the hospital, and the convent. Over all these places the Red Cross flag flew, and, to make matters more certain, Baden-Powell sent out messengers to the Boer commandant telling him exactly

where the women and children and sick were quartered. But all the same, shell after shell dropped into the women's laager, struck the hospital and smashed the convent. Baden-Powell was at first inclined to blame the bad gunnery of the Dutchmen ; but he was obliged finally to believe that the shelling of these quarters, which ought to have been sacred, was deliberate ; for no gunners, however bad, could continue shelling a town for several weeks without getting the range of it with certainty.

Just after the middle of November, Cronje withdrew, disgusted, taking with him a considerable part of the investing force, but he left behind the Marico and Lichtenburg commandoes, while he took the force more peculiarly his own to the south of Kimberley. But he left the guns behind, and the shelling continued without intermission.

MRS. DAVIES, THE LADY SHARPSHOOTER.

The fighting Boer general left behind him in command of the siege one Snyman. Mark his name well ; for it was the name of the greatest ruffian in the Transvaal—a man who deserved no better fate than the fate of Haman. The orders of the departing general were to shell the *rooineks* into submission. How Snyman interpreted his

orders, and how he tried to reduce the little border town, will be told in these pages.

His first attempt was when he tried guile. With great craft he pretended to have run away, leaving the big gun behind, apparently half-dismantled—just as though the Boers had suddenly heard news of a relieving force and had bolted in haste and confusion. Whether he imagined that Baden-Powell would rush out with all hands in pursuit to seize the gun is more than anyone can guess. Apparently he did. To anybody who knew anything of Baden-Powell the idea of his falling into an ambush was too ludicrous for words. He probably knew more about ambushes and snares of all kinds, how to lay them and to avoid them, than any other man living.

On this occasion, when dawn broke, the watchful colonel of dragoons saw the 94-pounder lying about on the veldt outside. He thereupon sent out two or three of the skilful scouts whom he had in his force to investigate. These wriggled out through the lines, across the veldt, and returned with the not unexpected news that the enemy, in undiminished force, was hiding. "So," said "B.-P." in a despatch which became famous, "we sat tight." And the Boers had their pains for their reward.

Now the shelling of the hospital, the convent, and the women's laager, previously very intermittent, became constant. In one week eight shells pitched amongst the gentle nuns; but those heroic women refused to leave the care of the sick, and were content when Baden-Powell erected bomb-proof shelters for them within their own domain.

On the 1st of December the garrison pushed out an advanced trench to within 1,400 yards of the big gun and proceeded to make it warm for the gunners. The idea was to compel the Dutchmen to move their tremendous engine to a greater distance. By continual volleying the British marksmen kept the 94-pounder fairly quiet for a couple of days, but on December 2nd a new Krupp 40-pounder was mounted on the opposite side of the town. Casualties now became somewhat more frequent, and Baden-Powell seems to have made up his mind at last that he was in for a long siege; for on the 4th of December he cut down rations to about two-thirds of the original quantity issued. So, what with more shells and less food, the experiences of the garrison could not be said to be entirely happy.

Up to Christmas Day there was little doing, except that one week-end the enemy's shells seemed to burst a good deal better than usual. One 94-pounder dropped into a chemist's shop, and hardly had it exploded when another fell into the street just outside. What was left of the chemist's shop a woman could have carried away in her apron. The next day a store was struck by a 94-pounder and entirely demolished. The hotel was also badly battered about. But, fortunately, the casualties were comparatively few, thanks to the system of bomb-proof shelters and warning bells and other signals.

It was on the 10th of December that Colonel Baden-Powell played upon the Boers one of his characteristic tricks. This was none other than the writing of a letter addressed "To the Burghers under arms round Mafeking." Many hundreds of these documents were printed the copies wrapped round stones and thrown from the British advanced trenches towards the Boer entrenchments.

Premising that the burghers had been kept in the dark by their own officers, he

informed the Dutchmen that the forces at present encountered by their commandoes were only the advance guard of the British forces. "The main body of the British is now daily arriving by thousands from England, Canada, India, and Australia, and is about to advance through the country. In a short time the Republic will be in the hands of the English, and no sacrifice of life upon your part can stop it. The question now that you have to put to yourselves before it is too late is—Is it worth while losing your lives in a vain attempt to stop the invasion, or take a town beyond your borders which, if taken, will be of no use to you."

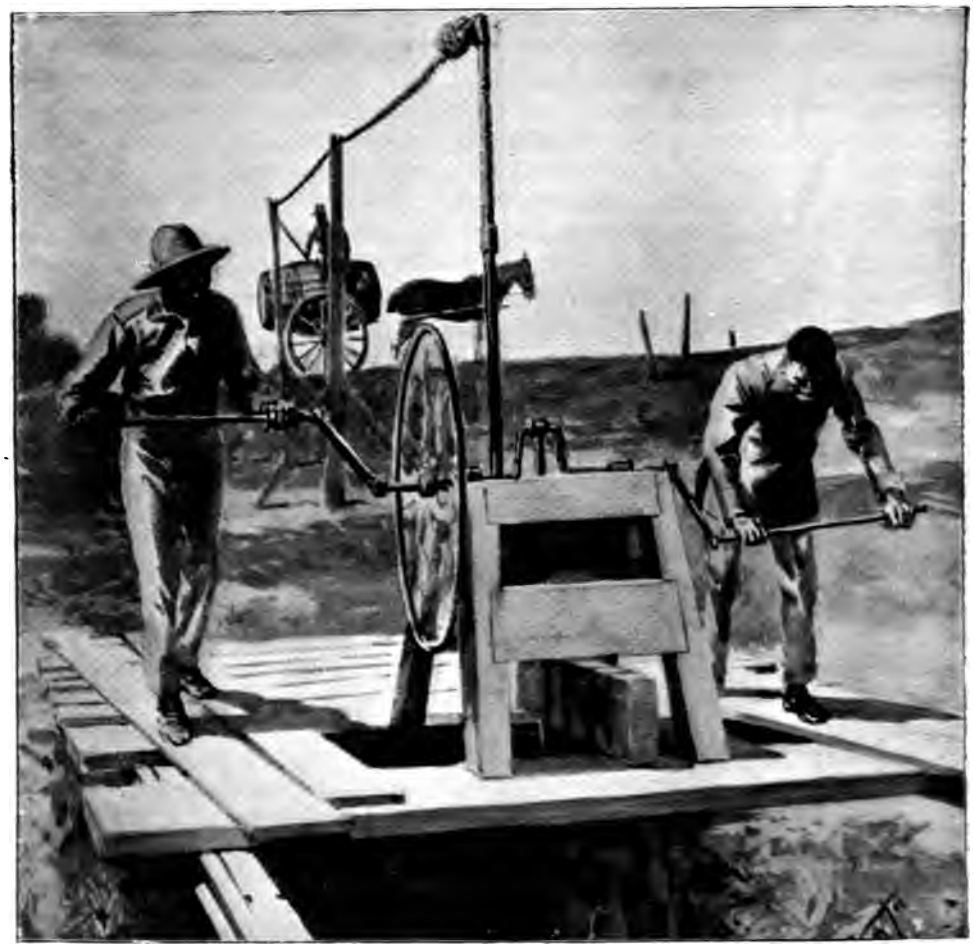
Then came a very subtle touch. "B.-P." shrewdly suspected what was exactly the case, that the burghers were buoying themselves up with the hope that foreign Powers would intervene. Wherefore the defender of Mafeking hastened to disabuse their minds of any such intention. "The German Emperor is at present in England and fully sympathises with us. The American Government has warned others of its intention to side with England should any Power interfere. France has large interests in the Gold Fields identical with those of England. Italy is entirely in accord with us. Russia has no cause to interfere. . . . The duty assigned to my troops is to sit still here until the proper time arrives, and then to fight and kill until you give in."

This was curious writing from a man shut up in a beleaguered town to the superior force besieging him. But better still was to follow. "My advice to you is to return to your homes without delay, and remain peacefully until the war is over. Those who do this before the 13th will, as far as possible, be protected, as regards yourselves, your families and property, from confiscation, looting, and other penalties to which those remaining under arms will be subjected when the invasion takes place. . . . Each man must be prepared to hand over a rifle and 150 rounds of ammunition. The above terms do not apply to officers and members of the Staats artillery who may surrender as prisoners of war at any time, nor to rebels on British territory."

This was simply delicious. One would have thought that it was the letter of the commander of 100,000 men, addressed to some small unruly crowd whom he did not like to overwhelm. Whether any commander of a besieged town ever before told the besiegers to go home in four days, after first handing over their arms, is a point for students of history to inquire into. We have never read of an instance in British history.

No doubt some parts of the letter had to be regarded as somewhat more than amusing pieces of bluff. For instance, the exemption of the artillery from the proffered amnesty was intended to convey to that body a warning in respect of their continual shelling of the women, the children, and the sick.

General Snyman was exceedingly wrath when he saw a copy of "B.-P.'s" circular; and especially was he annoyed that any communication should have been made to his troops instead of to himself. Indeed, it is usual, when the commander of one force wishes to communicate with the enemy, for him to do it by means of a communication to the hostile commander. But Baden-Powell doubtless modelled his conduct on that of certain generals of those times before firearms were invented, when it was not unusual for a general besieging a city to cast over the walls messages calculated to sow dissension amongst the



DRAWING WATER, MAFEKING.

garrison. No wonder Snyman was annoyed, for the whole tone of the letter was a tone of irritating superiority—the tone of the strong six-foot man who speaks to the fragile individual of five-foot-two-inches who is threatening to assault him. And when Snyman reflected that he was superior in numbers and armament to the man who addressed his burghers thus, the Boer commandant became inarticulate with rage.

But what annoyed him most of all were a few words in the middle of the note which reflected upon his courage and skill. "I may tell you," wrote the inimitable colonel of dragoons, "that Mafeking cannot be taken by sitting down and looking at it." This taunt enraged Snyman most of all. He did not mind being accused of shelling women and babes. But to be publicly taunted with cowardice and incapacity was more than flesh and blood could bear.

So, in a very complete fit of temper, he

sat down and indited to Colonel Baden-Powell a letter reproaching him with all manner of things—which caused "B.-P." to smile grimly.

The letter to the burghers was made public, and "B.-P.'s" words were telegraphed into every country where the English language was spoken. And the whole Anglo-Saxon world roared with laughter as it had not laughed since the famous despatch relating to the slaying of the dog. And everybody said, "So like old 'B.-P.'"

It was, indeed, the fact that Mafeking had for its chief defender a man of infinite humour. Every man, woman, and child, black, white, and brown, within the lines of investment felt all the better for the innocent merriment provided by their incomparable chief. He organised smoking concerts, at which he sang comic songs of his own writing. He organised also a picture gallery, at which he exhibited wonderful sketches and caricatures of the enemy. Never was there such a merry garrison. He might have to cut down their rations, but he tried to fatten them on laughter.

Beyond shelling, the Boers made no attack upon the town between the departure of Cronje and Christmas Day, and on that great day Baden-Powell saw to it that there was plenty of festivity. He was very fond of children and loved to play with them, converting himself into a bear or an elephant, and romping with them whenever he could steal an hour. He was quite determined that the poor mites should not be deprived of their Christmas treat; so he raked together toys and trinkets, and made a feast such as children love. For the benefit of all the town a ton of Christmas pudding was provided, and everybody went about exchanging visits and greetings.

But while apparently throwing all his heart and energy into the amusement of the town, the commander was organising something far more serious and deadly. And ere Christmas was well past, the town of Mafeking was changed from a festal city into a place of mourning, for on December 26th the garrison sustained its only reverse.

Seeing that Snyman adopted the policy of sitting down, Baden-Powell resolved to take the offensive himself and to make a sortie that would seriously cripple the power of the enemy.

About two miles from Mafeking on the north-west was a strongly fortified position, from which the defenders had been subject to a heavy and constant fire of rifle and cannon. And in order to quell this annoyance and to break the Boer line, so as to open up communications with Rhodesia, it was resolved to sally out upon this position, which was known as Game Tree Fort.

At midnight of Christmas Day the C and D squadrons of the Protectorate Regiment, under the leadership of Captain Vernon and Captain Fitzclarence, were dismounted and sent out with orders to storm Game Tree. The armoured train went with them as far as it could go, and Captain Williams, with twenty men of the B.S.A. Police, took out a Hotchkiss gun and a Maxim; seventy of the Bechuanaland Rifles supported, and this force formed the right wing.

On the left a troop of the Protectorate Regiment, with three 7-pounders and a Maxim, having two more troops of Protectorate men in reserve, took up position also.

Under cover of the darkness the 7-pounders were placed in position to shell Game Tree, it being the idea to

make an attack with the bayonet under cover of shrapnel; and as soon as daylight broke the three guns began to heave shells at the fort. Our gunners, being within rifle-fire, protected themselves by heaping up sacks of earth. The gunnery on our side was good enough for the range, which was soon found, and thenceforth shell after shell burst on the fort.

On the enemy's left a heavy rifle-fire soon broke out, apparently from pits which were beautifully concealed by bushes; and Lord Charles Bentinck ordered his Maxim into action to quell this fire. It was hoped that the 7-pounders would make a breach in the fort; but the Boers had strengthened their position to such an extent that our shells made very little impression. Soon the forces joined battle. The big Boer gun devoted its attention to the armoured train. The men of the Protectorate Regiment and the Bechuanaland Rifles deployed and opened a continuous musketry fire; and Vernon, putting himself at the head of C and D squadrons, began his advance to the storming of the fort.

Spreading themselves out in skirmishing order, the men of the squadrons marched forward, firing successive volleys in troops, as they advanced alternately to the attack. The steadiness of the charge was magnificent. No regular infantry could possibly have moved with greater determination, or in better style; nor were they daunted for a moment, though the enemy poured in upon them from the fort and numerous rifle-pits a tremendous and sustained fusillade. Now there were with Vernon many troopers who had taken part in the native wars in Rhodesia, and their previous experience, as well as their training by Baden-Powell, had made them realise the advantages of cover and how to take it. So it came about that they approached within 300 yards of the fort without very serious loss.

Then the fire became hot indeed. There was a piece of ground at least 250 yards wide which must be crossed; and this was entirely open and devoid of protection for the stormers.

On reaching the edge of this, Vernon gave the order to lie down, so that the men should get breath and pull themselves together for the final rush. Then he gave the order, "Charge!"

Leaping to their feet, with bayonets fixed, the troopers dashed across the lead-swept zone with courage undeniable. Bullets swept their ranks. Sandford, a captain, fell almost before the rush had well begun. A bullet had broken his backbone, and he lay in the agony of death upon the sand. But in that mortal moment he thought of nothing but his duty. "On, my brave lads!" he cried. "On!" Thirsting for vengeance, and greedy for victory, the British irregulars flew across the open. Six more men drop, and then FitzClarence is hit in the thigh by a bullet as he leads his squadron. On the instant another officer, Swinburne, jumps to the front, waving his sword and cheering, as the manner of British officers is.

It was a terrible sight, not without grandeur, to see the squadron charging across the sand, with men dropping at almost every yard, until of C Squadron only nine men and officers were unhurt. But the nine struggled on with the pluck and determination never excelled by any troops since war began to desolate the earth.

Vernon himself was leading D Squadron at another face of the fort, and despite terrible losses he fought his way onward until within thirty yards of the wall.

Then, as there was little cover, he ordered those of his troops who were still able to follow him to take cover and lie down for a few minutes.

Then again he gave the order to charge. With a cheer the mangled squadron rose to its feet and rushed at the fort. Ah! Vernon is hit. A bullet in the body. But he throws himself at the head of his men and charges on again. Without cessation the Boers continue to pour lead into the assailants; but, undaunted, the storming party push forward to within twenty-five yards of the muzzles of the Dutchmen's rifles.

Now was seen the character of the task upon which the men of the Protectorate regiment had spent their lives and their valour. In front of them was a ditch—behind that a fort; and the fort was pierced with three tiers of loopholes. To storm the place with such a force was clearly impossible; but the British irregulars had no thought of retreating without an attempt to accomplish the task they had set themselves. Not a Boer could be seen; and, incredible as it may sound, the stormers deliberately planted themselves at the edge of the ditch and fired at the loopholes. For some time the unequal combat raged. Then Vernon and Lieutenant Paton, and a scout, whose name was Cooke, rushed into the ditch and started clambering up the wall of the fort.

The two officers—God alone knows how they did it—scrambled up to the first tier of loopholes, thrust down their revolvers into the openings, and fired blindly. The troopers, no whit less brave and determined than the men who led them, dashed forward also; and, having no revolvers, thrust their bayonets through the loopholes and stabbed here and there.

It was magnificent madness, to which there could be but one ending. Vernon was shot again in the body. He re-loaded his revolver and continued the attack. But a third bullet struck him and pierced his brain. Paton was shot through the heart. Man after man dropped lifeless and bleeding, but fighting to the end. It was now seen that no valour, however courageous, could carry the fort, for of the total force who charged that place of death only nine could wield a weapon. Twenty-one lay dead on the ground and thirty wounded, and four of them mortally, while there were three whom the enemy contrived to capture.

Captain Fitzclarence, wounded severely in both legs, again displayed the greatest coolness and courage; and his conduct, together with his previous gallantry on the 14th October and in the night sortie of the 27th October, earned for him the V.C.

Nor were the officers the only men to show forth the valour of the race. There was Sergeant Martineau. He, when the whistle sounded the "Retire!" saw lying on the ground and bleeding from wounds one Le Camp, also a non-commissioned officer in the Protectorate regiment. They were but ten yards from the enemy's rifles; yet Martineau did not hesitate. He half carried, half dragged, his comrade to a bush about 150 yards away. During the journey he—being hampered in his movements by the burden he had assumed—offered a good target for the Boers, and a bullet struck him in the side. Disregarding his own injury, he proceeded to bind up Le Camp's wounds, and then helped him to retire. A second time a bullet struck the dauntless sergeant, this time bringing him down, and as he lay on the ground a third shattered his arm. He lost a limb; but he gained the V.C.; and doubtless he did not regret the price of the bit of bronze.

SHOOTING A NATIVE SPY, MAFEKING.

There was also H. E. Ramsden, a trooper of the same corps, who carried his wounded brother from the very edge of the trenches to the protection of the 7-pounder. To him, also, the Queen awarded the precious symbol—"For Valour."

The sortie had failed utterly, and Baden-Powell must have rued the day when he sent out so small a force upon so great an errand. The rest of the garrison, who had been firing upon the foe the whole time, were withdrawn within our lines. The three 7-pounders, after shelling the fort a little longer, so as to cover the retreat of the nine men who returned undaunted from the assault, limbered up and walked back into the town. And there remained nothing more to be done than to send out doctors and ambulance-bearers, and that grim party which did the ghastly work of the sexton.

It seemed as though the Boers who composed the force round Mafeking were the scum of the South African Republic; for they robbed the dead, and even tried to strip the wounded. But one of their officers interfered and forbade any more spoiling.

So ended the assault on Game Tree Fort—a magnificent example of reckless valour—an incident which showed how men can so brace themselves as to utterly disregard life, and can deliberately rush to certain destruction. But let it be said that if there was in the whole war no more valiant exploit than this, neither was there any operation more utterly wasteful and reckless.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE RELIEF OF LADYSMITH: FINALE.

WHILE the English Brigade and the 60th were barely holding their own on the 23rd (February), the Irish Brigade was maintaining its reputation for desperate bravery.

Before it was light, the Boers on Railway Hill had commenced sniping at Hart's men, who had reached the foot of the hill in the darkness. The Irishmen replied in kind; and the haphazard combat continued until the sun was well up. At 6 a.m. the artillery joined in, shelling the enemy's position persistently to prepare the way for the Irishmen. Here it was that the whole of the British guns concentrated their fire, and shell after shell burst on the kop with terrible effect.

Let us take a bird's-eye view of the position.

The hill constituting the enemy's main position was a lofty eminence, flat-topped, forming part of the Grobler's Kloof range or ridge—not a mere isolated mountain. And a force defending the hill, if it were in occupation of the rest of the ridge, could easily place riflemen to the right, so as to bring a cross-fire to bear upon the left of an attacking column. The hill itself was irregularly shaped. Its southern slope was almost bare, and there seemed to be a straight, sheer ascent to the top. A ravine skirted the side of the hill.

The general of the Boers had caused a wall to be built on the crest of the hill; had placed riflemen in the ravine; had disposed other riflemen on the ridge to his right, so as to pour in a cross-fire. Moreover, he knew what our men did not—namely, that just before the top of the hill was reached there was a break in the ground, and any party advancing to the attack would have to descend a steep declivity before essaying the final climb to the summit. This dip in the ground constituted a feature of great natural strength; for while a storming party was descending the declivity it would be in full view of the marksmen on the summit of the hill, and within 300 yards of the muzzles of their rifles.

It is open to doubt whether General Buller would have sent even the Irishmen to storm such a position as this had he known that it was held by the full strength of the Boer army. The British commander thought it was only held by a rearguard, fighting for delay, who would, as soon as a determined attack was made upon them, retire. For it is the office of a rearguard to delay an advancing army—not to fight it; to gain time—not to give battle; to make a show of resistance—not to resist.

Never was general more completely, more lamentably, mistaken. Instead of a weak rearguard, the hill was held by a strong army—an army that had determined to make at this place and time its last desperate stand.

But the Irishmen neither knew nor cared whether the stronghold was held by many or by few. If by few, the easier the victory.

If by many, the greater the glory. And so, on a bright morning, the now scanty brigade formed up and advanced.

The column was composed of Dublin Fusiliers, the Inniskillings, the Connaught Rangers; and, the Border Regiment having been left at Chieveley, the force was made up by the Durham Light Infantry, the Rifle Brigade, and half a battalion of Scottish Rifles. It was led by the Inniskilling Fusiliers, a battalion about 500 strong. It had been more; but there were graves on Tugela's banks. "The battalion will advance by half companies!" And the leading company braced itself up.

The attack was launched at last—the attack that was to break the Boer army of Natal and pierce their fortifications. In open order, nine yards between the men, the Inniskillings advanced; and behind them followed the Dublins. Grimly they marched up the hill, grimly and steadily, unchecked by the terrible fire of the enemy. It was a terrible fire. From the ravine came a constant stream of bullets. "Here! Go to that battalion of Fusiliers and tell them to clear the ravine with their Maxim." From the hill-side, from the rocks that strewed the slope came sniping rifle fire. Off to Barton! Ask him to direct the fire of a battalion on these.

From the summit came a fire murderous and deadly. The naval guns, and the howitzers, and the field guns hurled lyddite and shrapnel over the heads of the advancing infantry, trying to quell the fusillade. But it continued unabated, and, worst of all, from Grobler's Kloof, on the left, there rained upon the battalions a deluge of lead, coming crosswise. From it there seemed to be no shelter, no protection.

Down, men—down! We must give our gunners a chance to silence that cross-fire. Surely, too, the lyddite of that howitzer battery hard on our left rear ought to subdue the riflemen on the top of the hill.

So the Irishmen threw themselves down on the slope and broiled in the sun for a few hours, firing at the parapet of the trenches on the summit, and watching the bursting of the lyddite and the scattering of the shrapnel. A Maxim gun in the hands of a Fusilier battalion on the left of the Irishmen searched the ravine, and before its hail of bullets the Boers there fled to the entrenchments at the summit.

Noon came. One o'clock. Two o'clock. Still the firing continued without a moment's pause. Then Hart discerned some slackening of the enemy's fire.

"Forward! the Irish Brigade! Let these Dutchmen taste of your courage and your steel. Yonder is Ladysmith, where Irishman and Scot, Englishman and Colonial await you. Forward! the Inniskillings! Forward! the Dublins! Forward! the Connaught Rangers! Press home."

Right gallantly the famous regiments pass on, here and there crawling on hands and knees over sharp and slippery rocks. Men drop by the way; but the wounded will not let their comrades stop to help them. Storm the hill first; plenty of time to look after the wounded when that is done.

With incredible rapidity the brigade rushes up the hill-side. Hullo! What's this? The men curse bitterly; for they have now come to the place where the ground dips, not much more than 300 yards from the summit. And they must descend a steep declivity while the marksmen on the higher ground opposite pick them off at easy range.

Still, the intrepid Irishmen do not falter. The Inniskilling Fusiliers rush forward as to a banquet, and by sheer dash attain a point 200 yards from the trenches. "For-

'STANDING UP, THEY LINE THE TRENCHES.

ward! the day is ours." The ranks are thin now. For every three of the leading company who set out that morning only one is left. Still, there are enough to win the hill.

"Forward!" And with sublime devotion the Inniskillings, with bayonets at the charge, run forward in line of companies. A wild hurroo!—just to let the Dutchmen know whom they have to deal with. "Now gunners, do your utmost."

Shrapnel scatters and lyddite bursts in the trenches. The Irishmen, the leading company of the Inniskillings, can see their foes at last. It is now or never. And the Dutchmen know it. They know that if so many as six of those fierce demons reach the trenches the game is up. So, standing up, they line the trenches, lean over the parapet, and fire time after time into the on-coming rank. There is no lack of bravery here, for as the Boers expose themselves they become the mark of the British gunners; and many a bearded burgher topples backward into the trench into a pool of his own blood.

But other marksmen take the places of the slain. Kaffirs and comrades who cannot shoot expertly hand up loaded rifles to the men in front. Every officer and man of the advancing company finds himself the target of half a dozen Martinis and Mausers. The slope is strewn with bleeding bodies. "Forward! the Inniskilling Fusiliers!"

Alas! so devastating is that terrible rifle-fire at close quarters that there are soon none to go forward. The leading company is all shot down—all except four men; and how these have escaped is a miracle. One

of them is singed in a dozen places by bullets that have merely grazed his skin. Another has holes in every part of his dress and accoutrements—everywhere except in his body.

Neither do the other companies of the battalion, or the other battalions of the brigade, go scatheless. Their ranks, too, are thinned, until a battalion becomes a company, a company a section, and the whole Irish Brigade numbers not many more than a battalion.

"Lie down and take cover," the order comes. And on the word of command every man seeks for a boulder that shall afford some shelter from the devastating hail. Some troops would have retired—more or less quickly, and small blame to them. But of such were not the Irishmen. They would not retire, they said. They would die, if you liked, but never, orders or no orders, would they quit an inch of the ground they had so far won.

Bullets flew close as drops of rain in a shower—"like a —— snowstorm," was the description of a private of the Inniskillings.

But the ardour of the Irishmen is not to be restrained. There walks Thackeray, colonel of the Inniskilling Fusiliers, bolt upright, though the muzzles of the Mausers are no more than 200 yards away. Like the three faithful Israelites who walked 'mid Babylonish fires yet not a hair was singed, so Thackeray walked through the showers of lead unscathed. Here and there he spoke to a man, telling him to keep cool and fire steadily—and (what is that old saw about Satan rebuking sin?) to take plenty of cover, and not to expose himself unnecessarily.

Naval gun and howitzer rain lyddite on the summit; and at last it seems as if the Boer rifle-fire slackens. "Two companies to the front! The brigade will advance!" Whistles blow, officers shout. A company of the Dublins spring to the side of the now-leading company of the Inniskillings. The others form up behind. "Up, my brave lads, and forward!"

Once more the wild cheer bursts forth, showing that Ireland's sons are still undaunted. And with a front of two companies the brigade charges again. But the marksmen in the trenches are still unsubdued. No sooner do Dublins and Inniskillings leap up and rush with bayonets fixed than volley after volley, undiminished in fury and in accuracy, greet them. In vain the dauntless hearts press forward—no man can cross that murderous zone of fire. In scores the soldiers drop, as company after company move up to take the places of the men who fall.

The whistles sound again, and the survivors once more throw themselves on the ground, grinding their teeth with rage. It seems at last that the Irish Brigade has found a position impregnable to the bayonet. The khaki line tries yet again. Again it encounters that solid mass of lead. As when a drowning man, swimming against the tide, almost reaches the desired haven only to be picked up and flung back by one last tremendous billow, so the great-hearted soldiery, with a valour never surpassed, struggles forward, only to be hurled back, bleeding and shattered, by the deadly musketry of the burghers.

The Irishman who can see—ay, or hear of—such heroism without a blush of pride and a tear of sorrow does not deserve to call such men his compatriots.

Hour after hour, so long as daylight lasted, the brigade, with numbers so diminished that it seemed more like a couple of companies, wasted blood and valour on the steep hillside. And when darkness fell they made two more assaults.

Orders came from headquarters to relinquish the hill altogether. But the fierce soldiery refused to obey. The eighty odd Inniskilling Fusiliers—they marched out that morning 500 strong—swore by all their gods, by the honour of their mothers and the glory of the regiment, that they would be avenged.

So, a little way down the slope, they built themselves a low wall of loose stones for protection, and there they lay and slept. It had been worse than Colenso, ten times worse. Yet the men never murmured. "Few and faint but fearless still," they slept under arms, only waiting for daylight to resume the dreadful struggle.

On the left of Thackeray and his Irishmen the rest of Hart's force vainly endeavoured to storm the right face of the hill. From Grobler's Kloof and from trenches on the slopes a fearful fire descended on them. Time and again they struggled forward to within thirty yards of the front trenches, but beyond that no man might pass: and night found them still lying on the rocky ground grimly replying to the Boer musketry.

General Buller had seen enough to convince him that the Boers were fighting no rearguard action after all. The force on Railway Hill and Grobler's Kloof was too formidable in numbers for a rearguard, and the fight was evidently to be a last desperate struggle for mastery. The British general had recognised also that Railway Hill was a position that could not be carried by a direct assault. He began to consider, therefore, the best way of flanking his opponent.

Meanwhile on Buller's left a commando had descended from Spion Kop and Brakfontein, crossed the Tugela, and was operating against the British left flank. It would never do to allow the Dutchmen to work round and cut the railway behind Frere: the question of supply was quite difficult enough of solution as it was. Wherefore the British general called unto him Colonel Byng, and bade him take the S.A.L.H. and deal with those burghers.

The Colonial regiment soon put an end to the aspirations of Botha so far as they led to the delivery of a counterstroke against the British communications. In a series of skirmishes it drove the raiders back across the Tugela, with heavy loss, and after three days (23rd, 24th and 25th), returned to the main army.

The day after the repulse of the Irish Brigade, the West Yorks and East Surreys were detached from Hildyard's command and sent to reinforce the depleted brigade of General Hart. But before the reinforcements could arrive, the Boers made a determined attack on the hill. The schanzes thrown up by the Inniskillings offered protection only against frontal fire, and Botha sent men round to attack them in flank. Creeping round unperceived, the party poured in volley after volley until the position became untenable, and sadly the gallant regiments retreated, leaving Thackeray on the death-strewn slope. All the officers of the Inniskillings except five fell to the deadly Mausers. And all that day (Saturday, 24th) the combined forces held their own against the marksmen of Botha. All along the line a rifle duel raged for forty-eight hours. No man had taken his clothes off since the 14th—not even the commander-in-chief of the Army. For Buller was this kind of man: he would not accept comfort while his brave fellows were suffering hardships. What was good enough for them was good enough for him. He slept, as they did, in the open, with a stone for his pillow

and the sky for his coverlet. He shared their rough and scanty rations. He was continually riding from brigade to brigade, from battalion to battalion, to cheer the men by his presence; and it is not too much to say that his men grew to love him in those days of blood and toil.

On the 24th he set the sappers to make a road and to build gun emplacements; for he had resolved to recross the Tugela with his artillery, to place it on the hills of Monte Cristo and Hlangwane, and thence to bring an enfilading fire to bear upon the trenches held by the enemy. The stubborn Irishmen, the men who refused to quit Railway Hill, made this manœuvre possible; for had they retired from that slope altogether the Boers could have advanced again and made Buller's recrossing of the river almost impossible. As it was, the batteries recrossed without difficulty. The sailor-men dragged some 12-pounders up to the very end of Monte Cristo. Howitzers were also placed on the same ridge, and the 4·7's were made snug on Hlangwane. Thus he could fire across the extreme left of the Boers.

And while bullets were whistling up and down the slopes of Railway Hill wounded men lay there in agony. It was impossible even for men wearing the Red Cross to go out to succour them; for the moment a head showed above the schanze built by the Irishmen, the Boers fired at it with aim all too true. Some poor wretches crawled down to the British lines, and, being sons of Old Ireland, made light of their troubles. One gaily announced that he had "stopped a whole volley." Seven bullets were extracted from his body, and he survived. Another, with two holes through his lungs, being asked if they could get him anything replied, "A little—a little breath, please," and laughed consumedly at his joke. Not a man complained, except of the fact that he would not be there when the Boers were finally driven out of the position. There was a poor wretch who had been shot in the foot. He had a grievance. He swore it was a mean, dirty trick to shoot an infantryman in the foot so that he couldn't walk! And he exhorted his chum to make short work of the Boer who had done it, if such Boer could be discovered.

They jested at wounds and death, the men of that incomparable brigade. And grimly, tenaciously, they clung to the slope, though rifles and cannon, pom-poms and Maxims, hurled showers of missiles the livelong day.

Sunday dawned peacefully. A British officer advanced with a white flag and halted half-way between the lines. To him came a Boer, also with a white flag—a courteous gentleman. One of the educated Boers, this was, a lawyer by profession, as Botha and Joubert were and De Kock had been. And the two arranged an armistice for the day

Then men advanced with spades and dug long trenches in the brown earth—brown earth now stained and marked with red-brown patches. And priest and chaplain hurried forward. No campaigner, however hardened, could look on the sights to be seen that day and be unmoved. Sixty men of the Inniskillings lie lifeless here. And altogether in killed and wounded the Inniskillings, Dublins, and Connaughts lost about 600 men.

Here is a long, shallow ditch, a little over six feet wide. The fatigue parties bring a score of bodies and lay them side by side, faces uppermost. That is Jack. He was my chum. His face is disfigured. See! Two bullets have struck him in the cheek—one a heavy sporting bullet, by the look of the wound. Put him down

gently. There is Dan. We all liked Dan: he was so merry. The last words he said before going into battle were, "The Boer who hits me is a good shot, annyway. I'm that thin y' might as well be aiming at a blade of grass." But they have hit him. Ugh! Cover up that ghastly head.

From Grobler's Kloof, where Hildyard is, to Railway Hill on the right, the burial parties ply the spade. Boers, too. For there are bodies of unkempt, ragged burghers lying side by side with our own lads in khaki. And all along the line voices rise clear and calm as in English and Latin and Dutch, or homelier Taal, the ministers of the Christ who came to bring peace on earth, goodwill towards men, say the last prayers over the bodies of those who have perished at the hands of their fellow men.

"WOUNDED MEN LAY THERE IN AGONY" (*p.* 726).

And as the priests pray, and the

Engineers shovel earth over the uncoffined bodies, the burghers come from their entrenchments and the British from their lines and gaze at one another. Some of the officers interchange civilities—the offering of a pouch or a cigarette, and such-like. But the rank and file of both sides gather in lines about twenty yards apart, and gaze. A ragged-looking lot, those Boers—thus run the thoughts of the British soldier—and not all Boers either. That fellow is an unmistakable Frenchman; and there are two or three Germans. But those men with the dark-brown skins and tangled hair—a queer lot, and tough to boot. Do they really think they can hold us back? Still, they are worth fighting.

And in the opposite line there is curiosity, too, not unmixed with amazement and admiration. It has been one of the stock stories in the Transvaal that the *rooibaatjes* are a lot of beardless boys—the refuse of the gutters, who are picked up and compelled to serve in the army. Somehow these men do not look like that. They have beards, most of them, and they are not weaklings, if appearances go for anything. Anyhow, they are brave, if foolish—worth fighting. Do they think they will conquer the Republics after all? What a pity these English are so greedy of gold!

It was the first time the Boers—the greater part of them, at least—had seen the British soldiery near enough to have a good look at them. As for the British—"I fought every day for ten days, and was three times hit by spent bullets; before that I had fought at Colenso and round Trichardt's Drift; and until that Sunday I had never seen a Boer!" So one man declared.

Next day (Monday, February 26th) the troops were withdrawn across the river, all except part of the Irish Brigade—namely, the Inniskilling Fusiliers and the Connaught Rangers; and the troops were now disposed in a slightly different brigade composition.

Colonel Norcott retained the Durham Light Infantry, the Rifle Brigade, and half the Scottish Rifles (Cameronians); and the East Surrey battalion was added to him. The Lancashire Brigade, now under Colonel Kitchener, its third brigadier, became a Yorkshire and Lancashire brigade, composed of the South Lancashires, the Royal Lancasters, the York and Lancaster Regiment, and the West Yorkshires—a powerful combination that was to win much honour and perform valiant service. Barton lost the Royal (City of London) Fusiliers and the Welsh Fusiliers; and to his remaining two battalions (Scottish and Irish Fusiliers) the Dublin Fusiliers were added—a brigade not too strong in numbers but full of battle. Hildyard and Lyttelton were in charge of five battalions and a half—to wit, the (Queen's) West Surreys, the King's Royal (60th) Rifles, the Royal Fusiliers, the Welsh Fusiliers, and the other half of the Cameronians. It is necessary to remember the new brigades to prevent confusion.

The pontoon bridge was removed to a point much higher up the stream after the artillery had crossed by it; and Dundonald's cavalry division was placed under the cover of some hills on the right flank.

During the whole of the 26th fighting went on. Rifle answered rifle from dawn to dusk; and the Inniskillings and Connaught Rangers were with difficulty restrained from charging again at the summit of Railway Hill. "How long," said they, "must we 'stick it' here" But they were exhorted to possess their

souls in patience. The general had a great move on. To-morrow, perhaps, they might see—what they should see. So the fiery soldiers hung on like grim death to their rough entrenchment, holding the Boers at bay another twenty-four hours.

The 27th came at last—Majuba Day—day of hateful memories, of memories to be washed out. And with the rising of the sun the troops began to file across the Tugela by the pontoon bridge. Barton's Fusiliers came first, then Kitchener's red and white rose brigade, then Norcott's mixed battalions.

The plan of attack was this: Barton's brigade was to begin by assaulting a kopje on the right flank, called Pieters Hill. On the success of this attack depended the whole of the subsequent operations. For the kopje was on the extreme edge of the Boer line, and once in possession of it, the Fusiliers would be able to enfilade the other entrenchments of the enemy. This kopje captured, Norcott was to deliver a flank attack with all his strength on the hill where the Inniskillings lay—sometimes called Terrace Hill; while Kitchener was to lead the Roses to the storming of Green Hill—sometimes called Ladysmith Hill—a truly formidable position, well entrenched. General Warren commanded these two brigades. Lyttelton's men were to be placed in rear of the rest, ready to support any part of the attack.

Now the British guns boom in dreadful concert—eight and ten shots a minute from the naval guns: something less from the others. And with firm and martial tread, the three attacking brigades cross the pontoon bridge and begin to file along the river, heading first north, then east.

Barton handles his men well, checking their tendency to crowd too close together; and, after leading them along by the river for a good three hours, he finds himself in the ground north of the bend of the stream. There is a long wait at this point, for this is where the battalions are to deploy in line for the attack. Slowly the files come up, but at last his brigade is in line, and the light of battle shines once more in the toil-worn faces of the Dublins. Ireland will begin the attack. And the Scottish Fusiliers set themselves in line; and as you look at them you know that the men of the heather-covered hills will not falter when the bugle calls the onslaught. And the Royal Irish Fusiliers, too, will know how to avenge those comrades of theirs who wanted to die at Nicholson's Nek.

The word is given. "Nine yards between the files! By the right! Quick march!" The thin brown line swings forward. And the Irishmen sing as they spurn the ground. And the Scots look grim as Black Death itself. "Keep your distance there on the right! No crowding."

Little shells drop amid the ranks. Tick-tack! "Curse those pom-poms! Crackle-crackle! That's a Maxim opening on us. When will the musketry——?" "Oh!" A piece of lead, a mere spot, smacks a Scot on the cheek and draws blood. That's the crack shot of the Dutchmen trying the range. His bullet has hit a rock just in front, and has been shivered to fragments.

On, brave hearts. Another bullet drops, and throws up a little dust-cloud. And a Boer on the hill-top remarks that it is about 2,000 yards. Now the real business begins. There are Boers behind boulders on the hillside, Boers in ravines and dongas, Boers in pits; above all, Boers in those trenches on the kopje.

"Double!" And the line swings forward, firing no shot. The Boers in the ravines see them getting closer and closer, empty

their magazines for a last time, and bolt for the top of the hill to strengthen the firing-line there. But all do not reach the goal. Some have waited too long; and a dozen of the Dublins give chase; nor tarry until they have sent some souls to Valhalla.

hotter and hotter. Men drop, bleeding; but the sound men must not, dare not, wait to staunch their wounds.

Five hundred now. "Down, men!" Once more the khaki line clings to the brown earth, effacing itself behind boulders; and once more rifles speak back to rifles.

A SHELL BURSTING AMONG BOERS.

A thousand yards now, no more. "Down, men!" And, as by magic, the whole line sinks into the earth. "Magazine. Individual! Commence!" Everybody finds the range for himself; and for one perspiring half hour lies and pours out bullets. "Up! Double—Forward!" And again the muddy line swings forward. Over rocks they scramble. Down dongas and up the other side. The fire grows

"Curse that pom-pom! If one could only find the man who invented it, and prod him with eighteen inches of steel, one could die happy."

From the southern bank of the river the British artillery commanded the kopje; for the southern bank was the higher of the two, and they prepared the way for the Fusiliers with a howling tempest of lyddite.

Only 200 yards now. The Mausers hurl a hurricane of lead upon the advancing line. "Down! Let them have half a dozen volleys. Fire at the parapet of the entrenchment." And the British fire wholly together with such aim that the Dutchmen are fain to drop to cover.

The supreme moment has come. "Cease fire! Fusiliers, fix bayonets! Up! Charge! Let them hear you, my lads; let them hear you." Officers spring to the front and dash for the summit. There go the Dublins. With their usual luck they encounter the stiffest fire of all. See that company: see how it keeps the line. Yet there is not an officer there—no one above the rank of sergeant. The Dublins are at the foot of the entrenchment. They shout. They clamber over the parapet.

Faugh-a-ballagh! Clear the way for the Royal Irish Fusiliers. What though men fall by the way. What though comrades die on the slippery slope. We are the boys who clear the way for the Army. No wavering in this line. Hurray! The steel! the steel!

And the Scotsmen proudly hurl themselves forward too. Silently they have breasted the mountain. Now they shout; and the sun seems darkened. Long memories have they; and their war-cry is "Majuba!" And to the tune of it they throw themselves over the stone wall and into the trench behind.

A trench that now runs red. A burly fellow clubs his Martini and strikes a sweeping blow. But the steel of the Dublin man is swifter. He is only a slip of a fair-haired boy, yet his gun-barrel strikes against the breast-bone of the Dutchman as the bayonet point comes out between the shoulder blades. "Majuba!" Irish voices now take up the cry; and as they shout the reddening steel darts forward, and shears straight through bone and muscle and sinew. The trench is empty now, save for corpses; but there are two others behind. And with the howl of the tiger that has tasted blood the three battalions speed across the plateau.

More bloody thrusting and stabbing. And Mausers are cast on the ground, and ragged men flee for their lives to the base of the hill where their ponies are tethered. The shrapnel of the field guns pursues them, making their flight more headlong. It is ours, this dreadful hill. Helmets are lifted on bayonets, and the bleeding men on the slope know that they have not shed their valour in vain. They, too, swell the chorus of triumph.

But there is more work to do. "Fall in, men! Spread yourselves out, and let your rifles speak. That hill to the west is your target—the hill that is now beginning to grow brown." The lads of Yorkshire and Lancashire are beginning the assault.

What noise is that, coming from the valley? A shout, deep-chested. What makes the Tykes give tongue thus ere they have stormed Pieters Hill? Someone has come amongst them with news—"Lord Roberts captured Cronje with his whole force this morning." Well may they cheer. And there shall be more news this night.

Kitchener and Norcott now advance to the attack. Green Hill, the objective of Kitchener, is a triangular-shaped eminence, on the eastern side of which runs a ravine, very steep and of great depth. In this ravine the railway runs; and on the opposite side rises Pieters Hill. The Lancashire regiments were to advance up the face of this hill, while the West Yorks should slip along the gorge, and

clambering up the steep side of the ravine, should take the position in flank.

It was 3.45 p.m. when the South Lancashires crossed the railway line. Barton's men, from their hard-won position, were dropping long shots into the trenches on the top; but the Dutchmen took small notice of these. They saw the men of Lancashire come toiling up the slope, and every rifle was turned on this, the nearer and more dangerous foe. Up go the sons of the Red Rose, never faltering, never wavering. Here and there they stir up advanced parties of the enemy; and then they reach a point 200 yards from the summit. For a few moments the breathless infantry throw themselves flat, gathering breath for the final rush that shall avenge the slaughter of Spion Kop.

"Charge!" The word comes hot from the mouths of the officers. A bugle blows; whistles sound. And with a shout and a cheer the Lancashire lads are on their feet with bayonets levelled.

"My God! This is terrible. Down again, men." Alas, alas! Some are already down, never to rise again on this earth. For the Boer rifle-fire, that had slackened for a minute or two under the mighty shower of lyddite from the 12-pounders on Monte Cristo, is renewed with terrible violence. This is the Inniskilling charge over again. It is like the old story of the magician who could draw an invisible line across the path, over which no one might pass. The Lancashire men try time and time again to break through the zone of fire; but every time they lose more and more in officers and men. Thus for three-quarters of an hour the Lancashires are held in check—paralysed.

Far on the right of the line is a section of twenty men who have somehow become detached from the rest of their battalion. They are men of the South Lancashire Regiment. They have no officers to tell them what to do, so they use the intelligence that Nature has endowed them with. Instead of trying to rush the trench ahead of them, they creep cautiously still more to the right, until at last they find themselves on the east slope of the hill.

"Now we'll do a bit o' climbin', lads." Thus the grizzled ring-leader—a long service man and a warrior. Still stealthily and warily the bold twenty face the slope again, firing never a shot. They dodge from boulder to boulder, and at every yard of the ascent each man clutches more viciously the gun with bayonet fixed that he carries.

The Dutchmen are fully occupied in dodging the lyddite shells of the sailor men and in shooting down the khaki line in front. They never dream of twenty eager lads who crawl nearer and nearer to their flank. Twenty lads who breast the summit of the kopje and now find themselves on level ground, with the great Boer trench end on. Look! there are the famous farmer soldiers, with their rifles through the loop-holes, blazing steadily away at our gallant lads below. "Are you ready, lads?" "Ready all!" "Then charge; and remember Majuba!"

In a moment the Dutchmen hear a yell on the left. It is startlingly close. A glance over the shoulder—Almighty! they have broken in and the bayonets are at our hearts. With a dash and a vigour well worthy of their race and their regiment the twenty bold stormers charge up the trench. At every yard they stab and slay, and at every thrust they yell "Majuba." So fierce are they, so terrible, that the farmers throw down their rifles. Some

run, some fall on their knees and wave dirty white pocket-handkerchiefs.

The khaki line down the hill springs up again and throws itself forward. That something has happened every man knows. But who in the world it can be in the trench is as yet a mystery. With one tremendous yell, the South Lancashires and the Royal Lancasters leap into the trench.

Meanwhile the Yorkshiremen have been toiling up the steepness on the other flank. It would be bad enough getting over such rough ground in a flat country. It would be hard enough climbing such a precipice without the boulders. But the hardy sons of the West Riding make light of difficulties. And up they climb, panting. Shells drop amongst them without checking the advance a single second. Mauser bullets hit here and there a man. But the rest mount steadily, until one might almost imagine that this was Aldershot and the Mausers were only firing blank cartridges.

As they near the top they hear a shout. It is the yell of the heroic twenty as they dash into the ribs of the Dutchmen. Forward, sons of the great shire! Shall the White Rose droop while the Red Rose flourishes so bravely? The West Yorkshires emit their own deep-chested shout. They fly up the last 200 yards of the ravine at a pace no less than marvellous. And as the Lancashire Regiments leap the parapet in the front, the West Yorkshires, with the York and Lancaster Regiments almost on the top of them, leap into the trench on the right, shouting "Majuba!"

So sudden has been the rush of the Yorkshire men that the artillery, not knowing of their arrival, continues to pitch shells into that part of the trench which the sturdy sons of the Riding have cleared of the enemy. The North-country men, to warn the gunners of their mistake, stand up on the parapet and wave their helmets and shout. The batteries cease from troubling.

The helmet-waving is rather an expensive luxury, for a hundred yards away on the plateau is another trench, full of riflemen. "Another charge, lads!" And with honourable emulation the Roses charge side by side. Nothing can stop them now. They throw the Boers out of trench after trench at bayonet point until the farmers will not face them. And with marvellous accuracy the Naval gunners drop shells just over the heads of the infantry and complete the discomfiture of the foe.

It has been a glorious day for York and for Lancaster; but especially for that heroic twenty, whose brains devised, and whose stout hands executed, the flank attack on the leading trench. Before the rest of the brigade got in, they had killed twenty-eight and taken forty prisoners; and well did they deserve the thunderous plaudits of their comrades. The Lancashire men that day had washed out in the best blood of the burghers two stains—one on the Army and one on themselves. They had avenged at one blow the inglorious battle of Majuba and the slaughter of their comrades on Spion Kop.

Norcott's brigade had been climbing the other side of the ravine, aiming at the hill which the Inniskillings had so long coveted. They, too, were met by a fire murderous and deadly. But the Rifle Brigade and the East Surreys, who formed the front line of attack, swung up the slope at a great rate.

The Rifle Brigade clambered up the southern face, having the East Surreys on their right. The latter battalion swung round and extended to the eastern face of

the hill, and with a steady and regular march they swept the slopes like a gigantic broom.

When they were half-way up the hill they heard the triumphant shouts of Kitchener's men. This was the one thing needed to make the attack irresistible. Where the other two brigades had conquered, how should they fail? For some time the Dutchmen in the trenches made a show of resistance, and many a gallant rifleman and many a wiry Surrey lad fell to the steady aim of the stubborn farmers. But clearly the loss of the other two positions had disheartened the burghers somewhat, and at about half-past five Norcott crowned the hill.

Meanwhile, on Pieters Hill, firing began again at five o'clock. More burghers had galloped back from Ladysmith and attempted to retake it, and these, together with the most stalwart of the burghers who had been driven out by the British, established themselves on a knoll on the north.

Barton sent the Scots Fusiliers to carry this last stronghold, but the battalion, exhausted by its heavy day's work as well as by hunger—no man had broken fast since 3 a.m.—could not move so fast as the open nature of the ground demanded, and suffered heavily from the rifles of the Boers. So Barton determined to wait until morning and then to finish off the enemy.

That night the British troops bivouacked in the Boer trenches. They were tired and hungry. Some were wounded, others bore bayonets that had tasted blood. Pickets kept watch, for the burghers might yet return and make one desperate effort. Sleep, sleep in peace. You have fought your last great fight. The broken commandoes of Louis Botha are trekking in haste to the north.

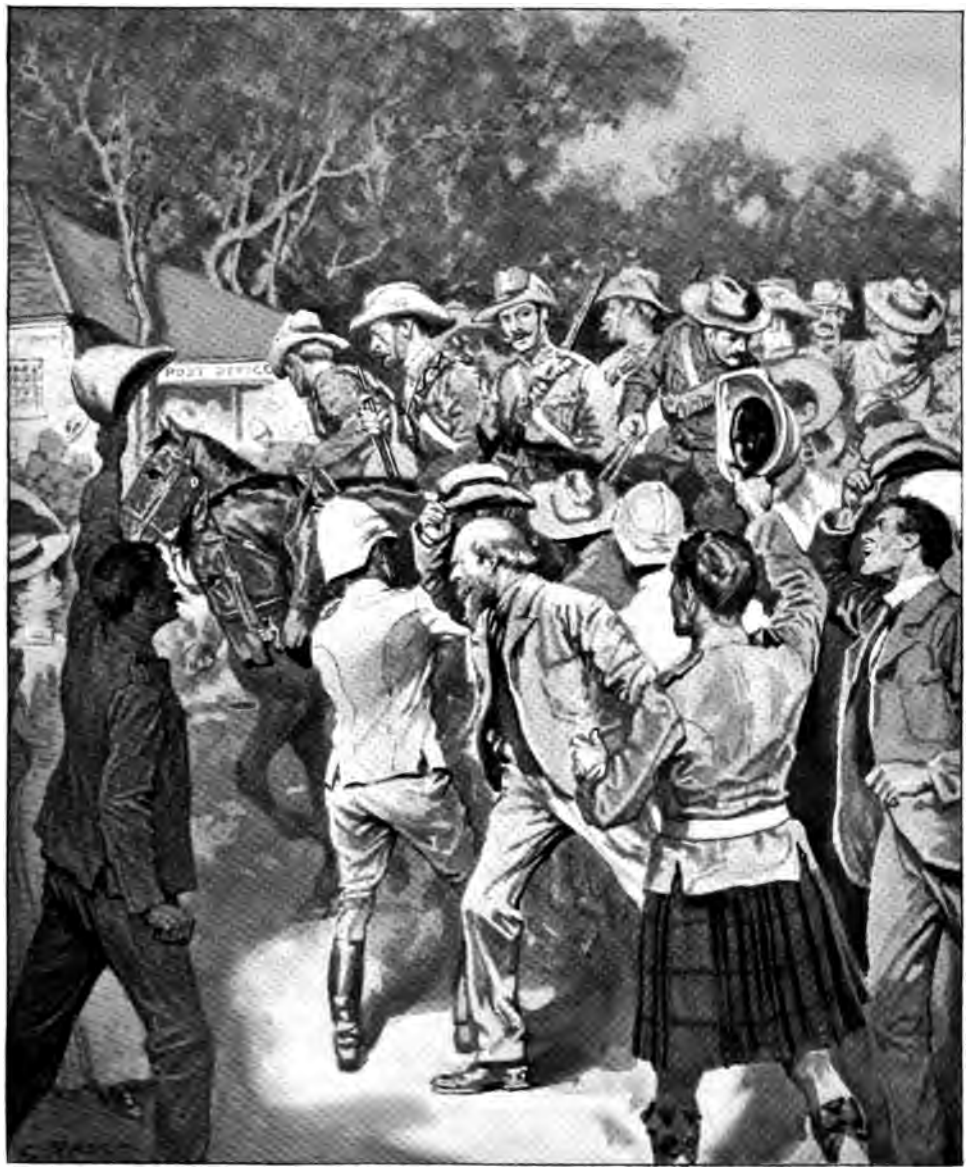
When the sun rose in the morning, and the Scots Fusiliers advanced to capture the knoll they had attacked as the sun was setting, they found it an undefended place. Buller at once moved forward with all his battalions.

On Wednesday morning (25th) the Natal Carbineers and the Natal Composite Regiment recrossed the Tugela, pushed forward along the river straight to Pieters Hill, and headed for Ladysmith. On the other side of Pieters the country became more open, and continued so until the hills round Ladysmith were reached.

Thus the work of the horsemen became easier than it had been for many a day, and they pushed their scouts to right front and left front and centre, searching the dongas and bushes with the utmost care. For Buller had sent them ahead in order to clear the ground for his final advance. "There is a slouch hat! And there will be more where that comes from. Round to the right, you men, and cut them off. Dismount here—horses to number threes* —skirmishing order—advance!"

There is a little firing; dropping rifle shots from a cleft in the ground, as the Carbineers crawled forward. Then a dash from right or left, a more rapid fire, and then you saw Boers scattering and running. Such scenes occurred a hundred times that day; but the Carbineers were working at high pressure, and they swept the ground as a housemaid sweeps a carpet. Some Dutchmen they captured, others they slew, more they drove ahead of them. The ground was littered with the flotsam and jetsam of an army in retreat. Here a saddle, there a bag of meal. Here a worn-

* This means that the third man in each four holds the horses of the three others, while the three whose horses he holds are engaged in some work on foot.



THE NATAL CARBINEERS ENTER LADYSMITH.

out horse, panting and exhausted; next a case of cartridges. Blankets, and papers both public and private, strewed the veldt, reminding one of nothing more than of Hampstead Heath after a Bank Holiday.

The main body of cavalry was behind, under Dundonald, who had forthwith ordered the Natal Carbineers not to go further than a certain line of kopjes about a mile and a half south of the outer circle of hills round

Ladysmith. Major Mackenzie was in command of the Carbineers, and he determined to keep the Boers on the run now that he had got them well started. And his men required no urging to press on. Late in the afternoon they reached the foot of the line of kopjes they had been told to occupy. There were Boers in small scattered parties crouching behind rocks and in dongas. These made some show of resistance, and more than one Carbineer was pitched headlong to earth as his charger fell with its foreleg broken by an explosive bullet. But the resistance was only half-hearted. Botha's commandoes had definitely withdrawn north of Ladysmith, and the few men who fired from the kopjes were only some of the poor wretches who were too tired to bolt at the same speed as the others, or had lost their mounts.

The Carbineers swarmed up the hill-tops like ants. Every man kept a wide look-out for something to shoot at, and whenever a slouch hat showed half a dozen carbines went off instantaneously. That afternoon saw the Natalians in occupation of the kopjes, and looking ahead they saw immediately in front of them the towering sides of Mount Bulwhana. From the summit of the great hill boomed now and then a huge gun; and the Carbineers could hear the sullen report of a more distant cannon. This was the naval 12-pounder on Wagon Hill replying to the Long Tom of the enemy.

The heliograph had conveyed to General White the welcome news of the victory of Pieters Hill, and his own eyes had shown him that the Boers were in full retreat. So the Naval Brigade was doing its handiest to prevent Brother Boer from taking with him some of his excellent artillery.

The nearness of the sounds infused into the Natalians a double dose of the devil. They had reached the point beyond which they had been told not to move. Dundonald himself had attacked Mount Bulwhana with another part of his cavalry division, and had been driven back in discomfiture. But the commander of the Carbineers did not intend to attack the Boer stronghold; he merely intended to ride straight past the foot of it. Major Mackenzie was sitting on his horse in front of his men when to him came Major Gough of the Composite Regiment. Said Gough, "Are we going through to-night?" Which question Mackenzie answered Scottish fashion by another question, "Can we go through?" "Can we *get* through?" answered Gough.

A fire lit up the eye of Major Mackenzie. His face flushed through the tan. "By God we can." "Then let us go," retorted Major Gough. On the instant there occurred something which does not speak too highly for the discipline of the Natal troopers. Every word of the conversation just reported had been heard by the men; and as soon as "Let us go" was out of the mouth of the staff officer, the squadrons drove in the spur and started helter-skelter down the hill, heading straight for Ladysmith. How in the name of all that is wonderful they reached the bottom of the hill with unbroken necks we know not. The pace was more like Epsom than Aldershot. And the hill was not only exceedingly steep, but its slope was covered with boulders and split at various places by dongas and sluits. But the necks of madmen, drunkards, and children are under the special protection of Providence, and somehow the troopers reached the valley unharmed. Not a horse was allowed to slacken its stride. Blankets and every kind of accoutrement was thrown away

to lessen the weight and to increase the speed.

And in one yelling mass the Natal Carbineers galloped headlong over the valley, round the base of Bulwhana, and soon saw ahead of them Wagon Hill. They knew that the sailors held that fortress, and they had considerable respect for the gunnery of the Naval men. So that, fearing that Jack might mistake them for a body of Boers—a mistake easily made in the half light that had succeeded to the broiling day—the Natal Carbineers began to cheer. Hitherto they had only yelled; but now they set up the sound that issues from no throat unless it be British. "Surely," they said, "the sailors will know that we can't be Boers."

They were right. The Jack Tars had just trained their gun on the on-coming horsemen when they heard the cheer break forth. The aim was altered instantly. Those could not be Boers; no Boers could cheer like that. On swept the Natalians. Their horses were now worked up to such a pitch of excitement that the riders could not rein them in. On went the squadrons, cheering like men possessed. Ghastly figures, like animated skeletons, rose to their feet and shouted a feeble "Who goes there?"

Terrific cheers answered the challenge, and through the picket line the Carbineers swept. And the pickets threw themselves on the ground and almost wept for joy; for they, too, were Natal Carbineers. Then the relieving troopers halted and formed up and waited for some squadrons of the Composite Regiment who had followed close behind them. They formed in fours: two Natal Carbineers and two "Composites" to each four, and at a steady trot rode into the street of Ladysmith.

THE FIVE REMAINING OFFICERS OF THE INNISKILLINGS.

Pallid women and ghastly men, with pale shrunken faces and tottering limbs, pressed round the horses of the stalwart troopers. Discipline was forgotten. Everybody shook hands with everybody else. Hundreds crowded round the Carbineers and the Composites and patted their horses and even almost dragged them out of the saddle with caresses. Mothers held up their little children to be kissed by their deliverers. And Sir George White and

THE HOSPITAL CAMP, LADYSMITH, AFTER A STORM.

his staff rode down the main street and met the first British troops who had come to his deliverance.

The siege was over. The great drama in which Buller's army had been the main actors, a drama of human suffering and human endurance, of heroic constancy and great-heartedness, of valour and perseverance almost superhuman, was ended.

Ring down the curtain.

CHAPTER LXII.

IN LADYSMITH: THE END OF THE SIEGE.

A GREY-HAIRED man sat on a balcony, a grey-haired man in brown clothes. He spoke wearily to a knot of younger men who stood by, and who listened respectfully. Suddenly he leaned forward, as though straining to conquer the distance. "English cavalry!" he exclaimed. "English cavalry coming to our relief." And he pointed to a knot of horsemen faintly visible in the distance. One of the younger men peered in the direction of the pointing finger. "I think," said he, "they must be Boers." "Nonsense! Do you think I don't know English cavalry when I see them?"

Of course he knew them—few men better. For the speaker was Sir George White, the defender of Ladysmith.

At last it had come to pass, after 118 days of weary waiting. Now Dundonald and his Natal Carbineers, with a Composite Regiment, were, on the last day of February, in the year of our Lord 1900, in Ladysmith, which had been invested by the Boers on November 2nd, 1899. The communication between the besieged garrison and our forces was about to be opened once more. And well might Sir George and his gallant little band strain their eyes.

For four months 20,000 loyal subjects of Queen Victoria had been isolated—and had suffered the pangs of hunger, the inroads of fell disease, and the stress of battle rather than haul down the flag of Old England.

The official message from General Buller, commander of the forces in Natal, was brief, as befitting a soldier. On the 1st of March he telegraphed, "Dundonald, with Natal Carbineers and Composite Regiment, entered Ladysmith last night. The country between me and Ladysmith is reported clear of the enemy."

"Clear of the enemy!" But at what a cost! The casualty list—killed, wounded, and missing—totalled up to 5,000, about a sixth of the army of relief. And of these over 2,100 were reckoned as the cost of the efforts made by General Buller within the past fourteen days—an average of 150 a day.

For the foe had been both wily and determined. And our troops had shown a pluck that would not be denied. The British army had been true to its best traditions—undaunted by reverses, regardless of hunger and thirst, stormed at by shot and shell; the gallant Inniskillings and the Dublin Fusiliers and the South Lancashires specially distinguished themselves. Day by day they had pressed on, until at length the enemy had retreated and left the way clear.

Dundonald's little band were the advance guard of a victorious army—an army that had purchased victory with its blood.

The march of the relieving force we have dealt with elsewhere. Let us turn our attention to the doings of the besieged town and garrison.

After the battle of Farquhar's Farm, from

which the actual isolation of the town may be reckoned, General White had some 13,000 troops of all arms, including ten battalions of infantry, four regiments of cavalry, the famous Imperial Light Horse, six batteries of artillery, together with many Colonial mounted infantry, and last, but by no means least in importance, a detachment of the Naval Brigade with six guns. And they all gave a good account of themselves.

Their first duty was to defend the town, and this they were called upon to do again and again. But they were not content to act solely on the defensive. That was more than flesh and blood could stand. And so it came to pass that when the enemy was disinclined to lead an attack against the town, the garrison were bound to lead an attack against the enemy. When a sortie was impossible or impracticable, the handy men of the Naval Brigade went in for a little effort of their own. And whenever "Long Tom" spoke angrily, the Naval gunners replied with capital effect.

Jack, whether afloat or ashore, has a gift of humour—sometimes of a somewhat grim character. An instance is recorded of how, when a shell from "Long Tom" dropped in Cove Redoubt, scattering bits of iron and stone all round the sailor men, a piece of a rock hit one of the gunners' caps and knocked it off. "Damit," said he, as he picked it up, "they're a-throwin' stones now."

But let no one imagine that the condition of a besieged town specially lends itself to the development of fun and humour—save in the lineal descendants and the kith and kin of Mark Tapley.

The last seven or eight weeks of the siege, ever since Splendid Sunday, had been one long monotonous record of shelling, starvation, and disease. The enemy dared not try another assault—the burghers simply refused point blank to charge up to the points of the bayonets. The garrison was too weak to make sorties—weak from sickness and lack of food. Indeed, had the Boers been sufficiently daring to make an attack during the last week in February they must have succeeded. Sir George White had not, at that time, 1,000 men who could march five miles. Not that the garrison would have yielded without a blow; but they could not have stood another severe assault. A couple of hours' stiff fighting would have found nine-tenths of the soldiery incapable of holding rifle to shoulder.

Ladysmith, as we have said, lies in a hollow, with kopjes on every side, reminding one somewhat of the city of Bath. Its normal population is about 4,500, but Sir George White found himself with about 20,000 on his hands—civilians, garrison, Indian coolies, and Kaffirs. This increase of the population by some 450 per cent. meant a serious difficulty in the matters of food and water. We have known cases where, owing to a sudden inroad of visitors at some seaside resort, a temporary famine has been caused—as once when the Lancashire miners visited Southport, when, it is reported, not only the bakers and confectioners, but even the sweetshops were cleared out, and when beer was not to be purchased for love or money.

But Sir George White had more than a picnic-party to deal with. His party was in all probability destined to make a long stay. How he fed them was only known to Colonel Ward, the "ship's husband" of the garrison. Ward, according to his chief, was "the best commissariat officer since Moses." True he had a few hundred sheep and a couple of thousand cattle, or, maybe, three thousand.

THE WAR CORRESPONDENTS' SHELTER AT LADYSMITH.

The Army Service Corps had done its best to grapple with the probable demands upon it, and the supply of flour and biscuits, and maize and oats and bran and hay, and groceries and preserved meats totalled up to a formidable amount reckoned in pounds. Medical comforts were strongly represented, as were rice and other things used by the coolies. But what were all these stores among so many —20,000 human beings and 10,000 horses and mules, and the cattle and sheep, we have named—with the prospect of having to last for an indefinite time. The supplies sent from the base of operations to the town had been largely augmented by the process of requisitioning everything in the way of food that could be secured. These goods were bought at fair prices, and proved very helpful.

Everybody was at once put on rations—*i.e.* a fixed allowance of food—which at the beginning of the siege consisted of 1¼ lb. bread, 1 lb. preserved (or 1¼ lb. fresh) meat, 1 oz. coffee, ½ oz. tea, 3 oz. sugar, ¼ lb. potatoes, with a small quantity of pepper and salt and an occasional extra in the shape of cheese, bacon, pickles, or jam.

This, it will be seen, was not starvation diet, but it was a very restricted one, and was gradually reduced until, on February 27th, the pound of biscuits had gone down to ¼ lb., and the 1¼ lb. flour to 3 oz. of maize meal; the coffee or tea had been reduced to $\frac{1}{12}$ oz., the sugar to 1 oz.; the preserved meat had vanished, and the fresh meat stood at its old figure, but, alas, it was mostly horseflesh. Sugar and milk and suchlike luxuries were reserved for children and invalids, and even to them they were doled out sparingly and at famine prices.

Those last days of the siege were days of real hardship—all the supplies tapering towards vanishing point. No cream for the Devons—no 'spuds' for the Irishmen —neither oatmeal nor whisky for the Gordons—and if the Lancashire lads wanted their favourite muffins they had to be content with a horrible concoction of mealie meal and starch and water.

"The horse is a noble animal; so is the cow," wrote the youthful essayist. But one prefers the cow when it comes to dinner-time. Very grateful and even palatable, when the first repugnance as to new eatables, so characteristic of the average Briton, was overcome, were the "chevril" and the horse sausages and the hashes and the steaks cut from the chargers of the cavalry and the draught animals of the R.A., and one soon ceased to remember that it was cooked horse in the mouth.

Tommy was even fain to try to fill himself with blancmange made of violet powder mixed with starch and coloured with indigo.

The ingenious devices of the hunters in the Wild West, and of Robinson Crusoe, were brought into requisition to render edible things at which in the ordinary way Europeans would turn up their noses.

The question of food supply was a hard nut to crack. Out of 518 horses taken into the town by the 5th Dragoons, only 73 remained when the siege was over, and most of those were *too weak to live*. The poor horses came off very badly. As time went on they were absolutely without food, for their corn had to be given to the men, and then the poor beasts had to be killed (before they actually died) for the food of the garrison. They used to be turned out to graze by the Klip River; and it was pathetic to see the intelligent way in which the chargers investigated the ground for odd blades of grass.

With such scarcity of the merest necessaries of life, luxuries were out of the question. Tea leaves and the bark and leaves of trees were the only substitute for tobacco—its price was 3s. 4d. per oz. The list of prices alone tells its own tale. Potatoes, 2s. each; eggs, 3s. each; chickens, 20s. to 30s. each; and everything else in proportion.

The question of clothing was also a great difficulty. Such a thing as a "change" was almost unknown. The first three months of the siege was the rainy season, and the men's clothes got wet through at night and had to be dried in the sun next morning. This was a constant occurrence, for there, anyhow, "it never rains but it pours"; and such wettings as we get among the hills of the Western Highlands or at Greenock (where in the season it does not always rain because it sometimes snows) were almost like a drought when compared with those that are caught in the rainy season of South Africa. And so it came to pass that the poor fellows had perforce to go on outpost duty without shoes and with their clothing in rags.

For weeks 120 of the 1st Manchesters had not one boot among them. To see the fellows who a few months before had landed all spick and span, clad in new khaki from top to toe, clean and bright, moving about in garments that looked as if they had been the happy tenement of legions of mice, and with bare feet, was a melancholy spectacle.

Then the water supply of Ladysmith had to be faced. Before the siege the town was partially supplied from a reservoir at some little distance, and partly from a river of somewhat muddy character—the two yielding an abundant supply for the normal 4,500 residents. The enemy, however, cut off the supply from the reservoir, and the river was the only resource left. It was not only muddy, it was now greatly tainted from dead horses and cattle and other refuse thrown or percolating into it. The water was for a time filtered and cleansed with alum at the rate of 5,000 gallons a day, but before the middle of December the supply of alum had given out. Then filtration alone had to be depended on, and the supply was reduced to 2,500 gallons.

The town was fortunate enough to have among its temporary residents a "handy man," in the person of Engineer Sheen, of the Naval Brigade, who devised machinery for condensing water, at first 1,500 gallons, gradually rising to 6,200 gallons a day. This enabled three-quarters of a gallon to be allotted daily to each adult inhabitant, with an extra allowance for the various hospitals. Upon the whole, the water question was arranged very satisfactorily as regards quantity, though quality left very much to be desired.

Disease came in the wake of scarcity. The natural variableness of the temperature, the discomforts of the rainy season, the overcrowding of the town, the insufficient and primitive sanitary arrangements (consequent upon the swollen population), added to the shortness of food, the scarcity of clothing, and the poor quality of the water, soon told their tale. Dysentery and enteric fever in the town proved themselves more formidable foes than the army of the burghers. About 40 per cent. of the European civilian population were invalided, and over 5,000 of the military were in the same unhappy predicament.

On one day there were 2,078 patients in the military hospitals, including 636 cases of enteric fever, 139 cases of other fevers, and 430 cases of dysentery. From November 2nd, 1899, to February 28th, 1900,

10,663 officers and men, making nearly 70 per cent. of the garrison, had passed through the hospitals. When Buller entered the town, over 2,000 men were lying sick.

The medical and nursing staff grappled with their work with the quiet heroism which has always characterised the work of these "details" of our forces. The death-rate was, for a time, low—considering all the circumstances of the case. Only 222 deaths occurred up to December 19th. We say "only," and yet it was pitiable to read how men eager to fight were helpless in the grip of the "enteric."

Photo :] [British Biograph Co.

A STARVING HORSE AT LADYSMITH.

We have said that the medical and nursing staff did their work like heroes. And yet the condition of patients in the hospitals was the reverse of satisfactory. There was a lamentable shortness of help — both of doctors and orderlies. Six times as many were needed as were available. And the supply of comforts and necessaries, both in the way of food and medicine, rendered it impossible for patients and convalescents to be supplied with appetising and strengthening food. Instead of the gruel, and beef tea, and sago, and cornflour, and milk, and eggs, being given with the freedom characteristic of the modern art of healing, the poor emaciated patients had to be content with infinitesimal allowances of the real articles, augmented with sundry concoctions of a much less palatable and nourishing character.

Many a man recovering from typhoid fever was nursed back to duty on half a pound of horseflesh and a pound of coarse maize-meal a day. Think of it, ye convalescents who turn up your noses at beef tea and chicken broth!

Hunger and disease—these were the real foes of Ladysmith. As to the Boer army—that was of small account! Nobody was afraid of that. Caves and trenches were dug for shelter against the projectiles sent in and over the town, and when you heard the whizz you burrowed in your rat-hole. But the losses from the bombardment were comparatively small.

From the time of the investment of the city to the day of its release, the garrison lost 178 officers and men in the various actions; the bombardment killed 35; 41 died as the results of wounds in action; other 397 officers and men were wounded in action, and 232 in the bombardment—a total killed of 211. But disease caused 600 graves to be added to the cemetery; and besides this there were many hundreds of men so shattered in health as to be of no further use in the fighting line.

Dundonald's Horse came none too early.

Ladysmith had only four days' food—at the reduced rate. For nearly a month the ordinary rations had been at quarter rate—one biscuit and half a pound of horse-flesh.

For many a day they had been on the look-out, even as a sick man in the dark hours of night longs for the break of day. Nobody in Ladysmith thought of hauling down the flag; but there was a very general weakness and weariness, and almost the first words that fell from the lips of the relieved ones were "No more horse!"

As Sir George White went to meet the relieving party, the garrison and the civilians cheered him to the echo. He saw two little girls who had come to gaze on him. "There will be jam for you all, soon," said the great, tender-hearted soldier. To the garrison and the townsfolk he said: "I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your support and help, which I shall acknowledge to the end of my life. . . . Thank God, we kept the flag flying."

It was a sight for the world to see—that wan and weary crowd, glad that the days of imprisonment were over, glad that famine was at an end, glad that disease was to be grappled with more effectively by good food and medicine, but, more than all, glad that the flag had been kept flying.

A few days later General Buller and his troops made their formal entry into Ladysmith. General White and his officers mustered at the Town Hall, with the garrison which had so nobly done its duty lining the streets. The Gordon Highlanders furnished the music for the occasion, and gave the signal, by skirl of the pipes, of the advance of the relieving force.

First of all came men who had been foremost in the fray—an escort of South African volunteers, then the general and his staff; and then, in the post of honour, came the Dublin Fusiliers. They had fairly earned the position in that series of gallant struggles which gave added glory to their famous regiment. What a contrast between the relieved and the relievers. These were sunburnt and looked in every way fit—those were pale and tottering; these were stained with the dust and mud of the veldt—those were in person and dress scrupulously clean, if ragged. But they were brothers in arms—both parties honoured the flag that had been kept flying, and each was proud of the other.

The scanty ranks of the Inniskillings—the heavy, earth-shaking tread of the West Yorkshires, the proud swagger of the South Lancashires—the men of Ladysmith cheered them all; and women wept as the khaki lines swept by.

The besieged Devonshires were specially delighted that the Devon general had brought them their freedom; and when the men of the Naval Brigade rode in, they met with a warm welcome not only from their mates who had stood the siege, but from all the onlookers and combatants present. The cheery "Hurroo!" of the Fusiliers, the wild shouts of the Welshmen, were intended to put heart into those for whom they had fought.

It was a moving sight—as women wept, and children danced, and men shouted—all for very joy at the sight of those who had fought and bled for them, suffering the hardships inseparable from a campaign in such a country.

All told—infantry, cavalry, artillery, engineers, ambulance men, and handy men—some 30,000 men took part in General Buller's triumphal entry.

No sooner was the march past ended than the Mayor of Ladysmith (Mr. Farquhar) presented to Sir George White an address, congratulating him upon his successful defence of the town. In making the presentation, the mayor said *inter alia*, his remarks being accentuated by continuous and loud cheering :—

"We meet here to offer our formal, but none the less sincere, thanks to General Sir George White for all that he has done for the town and for the people of Ladysmith. On repeated occasions, well-planned and determined efforts were made by the enemy to capture this town and garrison. These attacks were vigorously repulsed. The enemy was driven back. We recognise and realise to the full the magnificent heroism of our soldiers ; but we know that heroism alone, however great, does not suffice to cope with a brave, a cunning, and, it must be said, an unscrupulous enemy. There are the brains needed to direct and to guide, and the brains were supplied by General Sir George White.

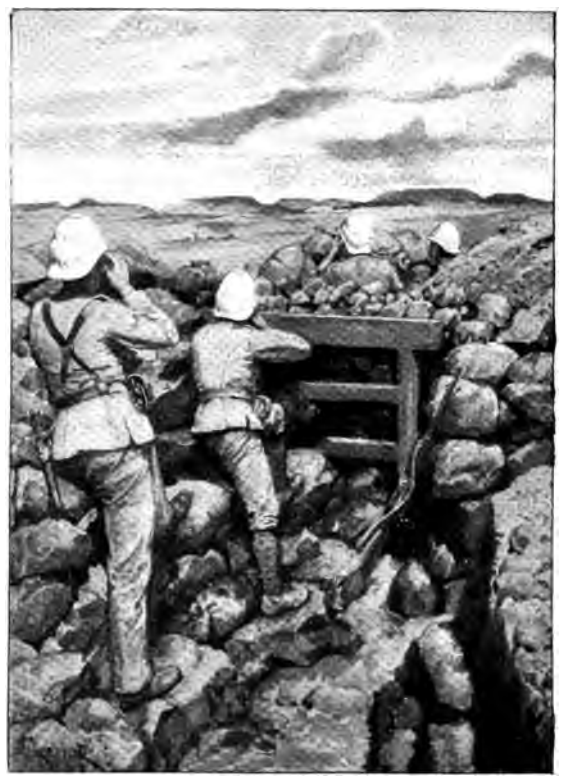
"Sir George White will be known by us, and he will be known in history, as the hero of Ladysmith. Brilliant as his record was before, it has received lustre anew by his skilful and gallant defence of the town and garrison. He has, by his pluck and ability, won fresh and undying laurels. On this occasion I should like, in a word, to mention the staff, particularly Major-General Hunter, Sir George's chief of staff, who is as genial as he is able, and Colonels Ward and Stoneman. The latter have been the feeders of the people. There have been nearly 20,000 people to feed every day during the siege—a pretty large family it was to care for, and we can all testify that the two chiefs of the commissariat proved equal to the colossal task. I will only add that I have frequently met Sir George, and I was always struck, not only by his never-failing kindliness and urbanity, but also by his undoubted and great solicitude for his soldiers, and for the welfare of you, the people of Ladysmith."

The speech made by Sir George in reply was in the best possible taste :—

"It has, in the course of the siege, been my bounden duty, owing to the exigencies of the service, and for the common weal, to ask you to submit to numerous and unusual privations, and they have all been borne with manly and loyal patriotism. For ourselves, we hope we have been able to do some service. I thank you, citizens of Ladysmith, for the help which you have given us to maintain her Majesty's Flag floating over your town. This town was the most coveted and the first objective of the enemy from both the South African Republics, and you have played no unimportant part in maintaining it for our Queen-Empress. I have every intention of copying the excellent example set in your pithy and short address, for I am not going to make a long speech. It has been a great pleasure to me to hear my staff mentioned in connection with my own name. I can testify with all sincerity that it has been the earnest endeavour of every member of the staff to use the unusual powers, which I thought it right to entrust to them for the maintenance of order and loyalty in this town, with every consideration and with every kindness that was possible for the benefit of the cause.

"I thank you for the mention of the name of that fine soldier who stands on my right, Sir Archibald Hunter. He is an officer and a gentleman, of whom I am delighted to say that he has carried out every detail of administration with counsels

of conciliation, with kindness, and forgiveness. He has of late been busy in his office, but that is not the place he likes to be in. He prefers to be in the centre of the hottest fire or at the head of dangerous enterprises, like that of Gun Hill. words to adequately describe to you the inestimable debt which we owe to that gallant officer Sir Redvers Buller, and to his grand fighting force which has made its triumphal entry to-day through your shot-swept streets."



KEEPING DOWN THE ENEMY'S FIRE.

But the maintenance of Ladysmith was not entirely a question of fighting : it was largely a question of supply. I think you have hit the right nail when you have referred to my excellent friend, Colonel Ward. He, I think it is scarcely an exaggeration to say, is the best commissariat officer we have heard of since the days of Moses. Gentlemen, I have not referred to the Relief Force, and why? I have no

Sir George White was invalided home, evidently much against his own will. The ostensible reason was his shattered state of health ; but the man in the street could not get rid of the impression that some of his criticisms on the War Office, as reported by Mr. Winston Spencer Churchill, had something to do with it. At Cape Town he had a brilliant send-off, including an address from the Corporation

of Cape Town, in which his "courageous bearing and example," and his "kindly and considerate nature" were extolled. The general eulogised the bravery of his troops, specially naming that splendid soldier and general, the late Sir W. Penn Symons, and passing on to General Ian Hamilton and General French. The help of the Naval men was handsomely alluded to: "They came at the nick of time, as Jack generally does. Their faces, as they hauled their big guns into position and stood on the ramparts to see the effect of every shot, were enough to put heart into a coward." Of the Imperial Light Horse he said: "I can confidently and sincerely say that I never had the honour to command so fine a fighting force. Five of their commanding officers fell fighting in their foremost line; but that does not mean that the men junior to them wanted leading. Far from it. The junior trooper would take his stand as bravely, as independently, and without anybody near him, as if he had been locked in the centre of his own squadron." He spoke with pride and sorrow of the sixteen gallant Manchesters, who for nearly twenty hours held the critical position at Cæsar's Camp—and of Sergeant Bozeley, of the Artillery, who in the same engagement, after his leg and arm had been shot off, cried out, "Here, you men, roll me out of the way and go on working the gun."

Of such men, from generals to privates, heroes are easily made—

"'Tis the bold race,
Laughing at toil and gay in danger's face,"

who form the strength of the Empire.

General White left Cape Town amid the enthusiasm of crowds stirred to their depths, met to honour bravery and success. On his arrival home he was met by a message from his Queen and the ovations of a Southampton crowd.

His subsequent appointment to the honourable position of Governor of Gibraltar was the least that could be done for one who had so nobly kept the flag flying.

CHAPTER LXIII.

CRONJE'S LAST MARCH.

THE first thing to be done after that "Ja" was to telegraph to the Queen and the Government the glad tidings. The field-marshal did not fail to point out in his despatch the happy coincidence of the date of victory with the anniversary of the ancient defeat. The second thing to be done—obviously—was to cable to the Dominion the thanks of the Army for sending to join its ranks a body such as the Canadian Regiment, and the Army's pride in its latest accession. It is not given to every regiment to win such glory in its first active service.

The news buzzed round the camps, "Unconditional surrender"; and the men forgot their wounds, their hunger, their rags, their fevers, for the joy of it.

The Boer general, upon being asked how many men were in his laager, replied, "About 3,000." But he was too modest. In point of fact there were 4,000. And these, together with others who had been caught during the week, and who had come out on various nights and given themselves up, made 4,800 prisoners. Four guns also were found in the camp.

The Buffs were ordered to receive the surrender, and they marched down to the river-bank. Men crowded out now, ragged men, some with the beardless faces of sixteen, others with the grey hair of sixty. There were men who had been prosperous townsfolk and substantial farmers; there were men who had scratched a bare livelihood from the soil of remote districts across the Vaal. For the most part they came out gladly enough. The river-bed had not been such a paradise but that they were pleased to leave it. Here and there would be a scowling face of some patriot who keenly felt the downfall of his country. But, for the most part, be it said, the burghers were glad to surrender.

Some, as they handed in their arms to the Buffs, cursed their former commandant aloud. They would have surrendered long before, they said, if he had not been so cruelly obstinate. The British soldiers descended into the laager and saw sickening sights. Wounded men were lying in holes unfit for dogs. The air was filled with the stench of dead horses. A woman, wounded in the breast, dandled a child in her arms.

This was Majuba Day, and the British army had bitter memories of it. But the soldiers thought of none of these things at that moment. They succoured the wounded, carrying them out of the lairs on blankets to the pure air on the banks and the skilled aid of British medical men. They gave of their scanty rations to the prisoners, who wolfed the bully beef and tough biscuits as if they had been venison and sweetmeats.

Out came the burghers in a long file, handing their arms and ammunition to one of the Buffs, who passed rifle and bandolier over to others, who stacked them close by. Then came the question

of a guard. It would be necessary to send the prisoners to Cape Town, and Lord Roberts intended to confer the honour of guarding them upon the Citizen Soldiers of London.

LOOTING THE LAAGER AFTER PAARDEBERG.

Meanwhile Cronje, who had asked and been granted the favour of having his wife and his secretary to accompany him in his captivity, was unconcernedly eating a hearty breakfast—consuming with considerable relish the few dainties of the headquarters-staff mess. He asked for a cigar at the end of the meal, and when he had smoked that put in a request for another. But cigars had run out, and he had to be content with a pipe and some Boer tobacco.

The mounted infantry of the C.I.V. were ordered up. The captured commandant, with his wife and secretary, mounted an Artillery waggon; and, with the young Londoners to guard them, set off for Modder River. It was noticed that Mrs. Cronje wore a silk dress that she had looted from Lady Sarah Wilson at Mafeking.

Amongst the captured was Albrecht, the Austrian artillerist in the employment of

the Free State. Albrecht was very frank. He had nothing to say about his capture, except that he had told Cronje to take care of his left flank, and that this was the fortune of war.

At 12.30 p.m. on February 28th, the Guards' camp at Modder River was roused by the news, "Cronje is coming." Coldstreams and Grenadiers and Scots turned out to view the man who had smashed the Highland Brigade at Magersfontein, and decimated their own battalions at Modder River.

General Pretyman, commanding the escort, handed the prisoners over to the station commander. All sorts of military salutes and honours were accorded to the captive general, but he never took the slightest notice of them. A sumptuous luncheon, with wine and champagne and other luxuries, were provided for him. He never even said "Thank you." "He is a regular savage," said a Guardsman whose salute had not been returned or acknowledged. The Guardsman was wrong. Savages have better manners. In fact, so boorish was his behaviour, that the officers at Modder River were quite thankful to get rid of him. This they did very soon, for he left for Cape Town the same day.

Next morning, in marched the 4,000 prisoners, guarded by an escort of the C.I.V. and a troop of the 1st Life Guards. They were accommodated in a number of tents, surrounded by a wire fence, and guns loaded with case* were drawn up round them. The cavalry gave up this escort duty on arriving at Modder River, and guard duty was performed by the Loyal North Lancashires, the men whom these same Boers had bombarded in Kimberley. As far as was possible, the prisoners were treated with consideration. Fifteen men had to use each tent, and relatives and friends were allowed to go together. Rations also were served out to them on a liberal scale; and soon the prisoners, somewhat tired by their march from Paardeberg, cheered up.

In batches of about 600 the 4,000 were removed by train to Cape Town as quickly as possible, and were there confined, some on board ships in the harbour at Simon's Bay, and some in a camp on the shore. The country through which they had to pass on their way to captivity was largely Dutch, and was in parts disaffected. Hitherto the people had seen no signs of British success. Even when any public print contained an account of some advantage gained by the English, the Dutch were told not to believe it. And when they saw Lord Methuen defeated, and heard of Stormberg and Colenso, many had begun to believe that British might had failed, and that British rule was coming to an end. The sight of trainload after trainload of Boers, guarded by men in khaki, must have convinced these half-rebellious children of the Empire that the tide of war had turned. And, more than all, the capture of Cronje, the most celebrated and most determined of all the Transvaal generals, must have convinced them that if Great Britain was slow to strike, yet she struck surely in the end.

The news of the taking of Cronje spread all over South Africa with incredible rapidity. The Governments of the two Republics kept it back from their people

* "Case" is a special kind of shell. It is a thin cylinder filled with bullets, and when fired it bursts as soon as it leaves the muzzle of the gun; it is used on such occasions as when cavalry or infantry charge up to the muzzle of the gun. Other shells are timed to burst a considerable distance after leaving the gun

as long as possible. When the Boers were told that Cronje had surrendered with his whole army they refused to credit the tidings. They had, you see, no respect for the intelligence of the British soldiers They had every respect for the generalship of Piet Cronje. His sobriquet of "the Fighting General" showed what they thought of his prowess, and a South African Dutchman would as soon have thought of Paul Kruger turning traitor as of Piet Cronje surrendering to the English.

Hence, when the burghers were compelled to believe in the capture of their great stay and hope the effect of the blow upon them was enormous. At last it dawned upon them that there was in the service of the Queen somebody who refused to fight like a bull with its head down. Here was an Englander who did not rush hot-headed at entrenchments. He had clearly circumvented the Fighting General, and had finally, at slight expense, forced him to capitulate. To say that these tidings struck consternation into the heart of the burghers is to speak feebly. From that moment the Dutchmen would not willingly face the British. Moreover, they had seen how Cronje had been surrounded and cut off, and thenceforth they dreaded the same fate.

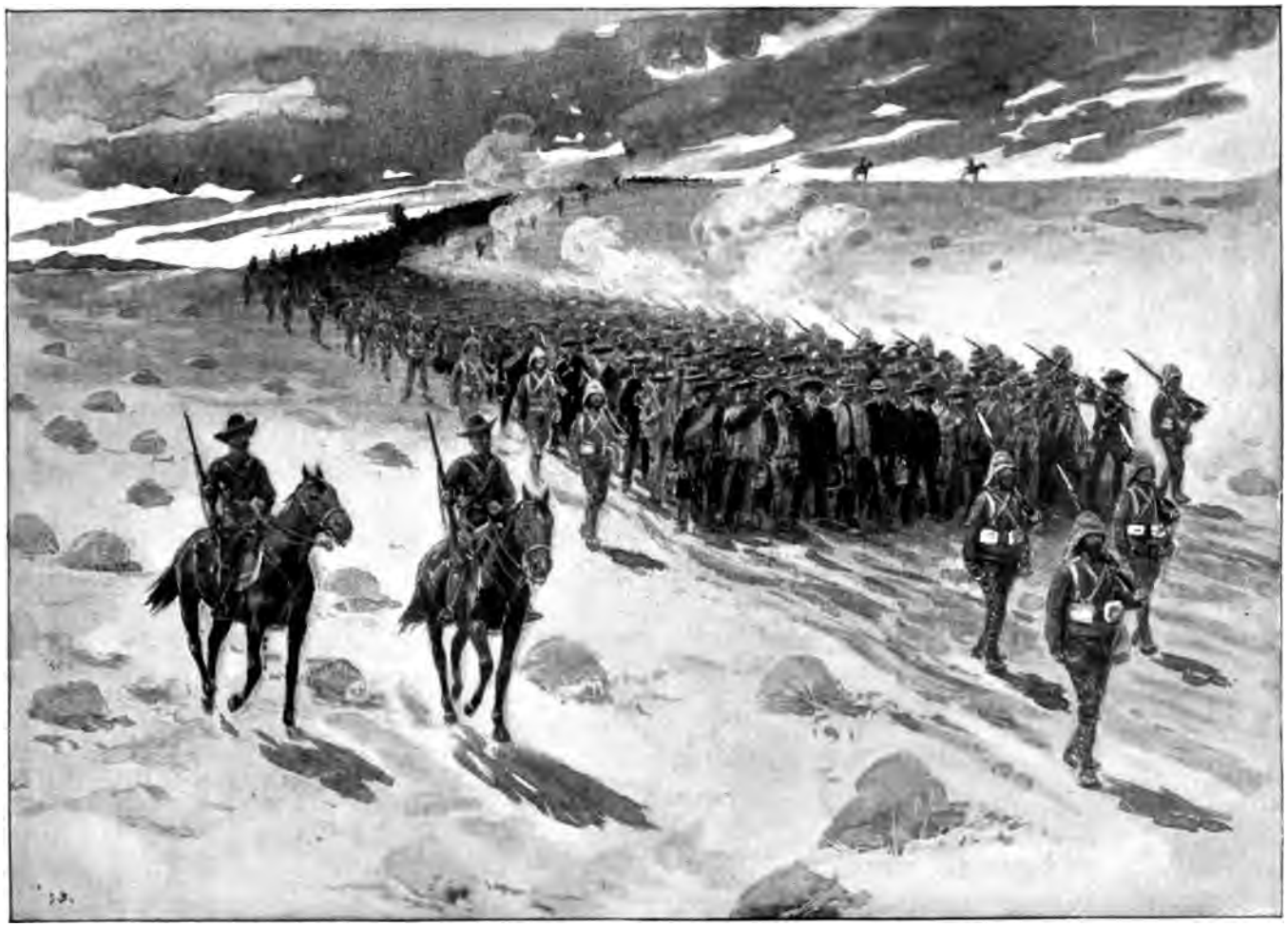
Let but a general make a move round the flank of any Boer commando and that commando would retreat, abandoning any position, however strong. In fact, their dread of being out-flanked became almost a superstition, and it is no exaggeration to say that the fate of Cronje made a difference of many hundreds of lives to the British army. For it enabled Lord Roberts to manœuvre the foe out of positions which he must otherwise have carried at great loss.

On receipt of the news of the desperate straits of their most trusted commandant, the Presidents of the two Republics were seized with something very like panic. They recovered afterwards, but that is another story. President Kruger hurried down from Pretoria to Bloemfontein and met the President of the sister State in hurried consultation. The burghers, some of them, had become frightened; so much so that it required the most persuasive accents of Mr. Steyn, and many Scriptural exhortations from Mr. Kruger, to bring them up to fighting point once more.

At last, however, by persuasion and bullying, by appeals to patriotism and religious feeling, the two Presidents managed to take the field at the head of something like 7,000 men. With these they hurried towards Paardeberg. Too late. The Fighting General was already in the hands of the enemy, and his army was on the way to Cape Town.

"The Almighty has thought fit to chasten us," said Kruger; "yet He will not altogether abandon His chosen people. Quit yourselves like men. Fight as your fathers fought, and the British will even now be stayed."

Lord Roberts removed his camp to a place called Osfontein, where, as we have mentioned before, skirmishing had already taken place. Here he was able to reorganise his brigades and to improve the sanitary condition of his camp. For the Boers, though defeated, had left a legacy of death behind them. The laager and the trenches in the river-bed were so utterly foul that the British soldiers who were sent there for various purposes contracted typhoid fever in scores. Dysentery also broke out to an alarming extent, consequent upon the poor feeding and the bad water. Now dysentery, if taken in



THE LAST MARCH OF THE FOUR THOUSAND.

time and judiciously treated, can be arrested before much harm is done. But it is most regrettable to record that at this time there was a scarcity of drugs and medical comforts and conveniences.

To begin with, when the chief of staff organised the transport for the march, he wanted every mule he could lay his hands upon for the carriage of food and ammunition for the fighting line. And so he cut down the medical transport by about two-thirds. Whether he was blameworthy in this regard was a matter to be investigated later. One thing is certain, that the first duty of Lord Kitchener was to supply the fighting line; and if it was absolutely necessary to choose between caring for the strong men and succouring the sick and wounded, no soldier could hesitate a single moment. No responsible military man in the world would neglect his fighting line to look after the welfare of men who had become useless.

The Army knew this. The Army recognised that although The Egyptian was a hard man, yet he was a man of great ability, and that he had done the right thing under the circumstances. There was a soldier who suffered from typhoid and was lying for four days without shelter. He had not either bed or mattress, nor even bed-clothes; he lay on the veldt in his uniform. He was asked what he thought about it, and he never hesitated to declare that if Lord Kitchener had used the space that would have been required for hospital accommodation for him, to the neglect of the supply of cartridges and bully beef for the sound men, Lord Kitchener would deserve to be hanged.

Moreover, the loss of the £100,000 worth of food at Waterval Drift had seriously complicated the matter, and had added very much to the medical difficulties in many ways. For one thing, a great many medical stores had been captured with that convoy, and besides, the food stuffs, which formed the main part of the lost stores, would have kept in good health many a man who succumbed.

It took Lord Roberts about a week to reorganise his army at Osfontein. He sent for the Guards' Brigade from the Modder. He weeded out sundry officers who had proved themselves to be unfit for their command. And in connection with this weeding out there arose the word "Stellenbosching." Stellenbosch * was a place on the Cape Town-to-Kimberley railway, at which a remount camp had been established. And it became customary to send thither such officers as were found incompetent. And so, if a subaltern led his patrol into an ambush, or a colonel marched his battalions up to a donga where the enemy was waiting for him with loaded rifles, or anybody committed one of those half-hundred foolishnesses which were only too common in the early part of the campaign, you heard it said, "He will be Stellenbosched."

While the British field-marshal was mobilising and knitting his army together for a sudden pounce on the Free State capital, the captured Boer general was lying in a ship of war in Simon's Bay. He did not go down to Cape Town without incident. Just as his train was leaving the station at Modder River, Albrecht, the Free State artillerist, lurched up to the railway carriage window, put his head through and demanded, "What do you think about your left flank now?" What Black Cronje † said to his whilom lieutenant

* The word *bosch* is pronounced like the English *bush*, and has the same meaning.

† One of the Boer general's nicknames was *Zwart* Cronje, meaning *black*. In fact, he had a complexion almost like that of a Kaffir.

is not recorded. Once in Simon's Bay, Cronje's journey was not, as he thought, concluded, but had only just begun. The British Government deliberated long and anxiously upon the fate of the prisoners. It was obviously impossible, and would be very expensive, to put the whole 4,000 on board ship. It was undesirable, and even dangerous, to establish them in a camp on land. In point of fact, the Boers had so many sympathisers in Cape Town, many of them relations of no very distant kin, that it would be a most onerous task to guard the captives. Within a fortnight of the arrival of the prisoners at the Cape a score of them had escaped—no doubt with the connivance of friends in the town.

At last the British Government resolved to send General Cronje and his men to St. Helena. There they would be safe; for they would be isolated from country and sympathisers. Besides, a small guard would suffice to control them, and escape would be practically impossible. It is difficult to say how far this step was wise. One thing is certain: that the Boers, being an inland people, dreaded the long sea voyage. Indeed, after the first batch had been sent to Napoleon's old prison, it was quite usual for Boers who surrendered to beg as a favour that they might not be sent to St. Helena. And there is a good deal of cause for believing that the reason why many of them held out so long and so determinedly as they did after the occupation of Bloemfontein and Pretoria, was that they preferred death to exile across the sea.

At St. Helena the prisoners rapidly improved in health and appearance. When they emerged from the bed of the river that Majuba morning not one in fifty looked reasonably healthy. But the sea voyage and the good feeding, and finally the wholesome air of their island prison began to improve both their physique and their spirits. After two months' sojourn, the sickly, dispirited crew had become a healthy and apparently contented party.

On the 2nd of March Lord Roberts visited Kimberley, and received the thanks of the garrison and the townsfolk. He might have spared himself the fatigue of a ride of nearly eighty miles, but he thought it right to go himself in order to see if anything needed to be done. By this time coal had come from the south, so that some of the mines had resumed working. Food also had been brought in. And if it had not been for the waggon-loads of sick and wounded every now and then dawdling across the veldt into the town, and for the scores of men in khaki who paraded the streets under arms, and for the houses here and there roofless, Kimberley might have been mistaken for a town flourishing in a peaceful and undisturbed country.

Lord Methuen had not been permitted to accompany the army in its march on the Free State capital. Instead, he had been appointed Military Governor of Kimberley and the district, with orders to pacify the country and to disarm all Free Staters and rebels within the sphere of his command. Methuen was not Stellenbosched. The Highland Brigade said he ought to be. But Lord Roberts evidently thought that although the Guardsman general had been such a distinct and emphatic failure when commanding a division, he might be trusted to do better when commanding a smaller force. Some men are like that, and it is to be said that after Lord Methuen ceased to be an independent commander he accomplished a great deal of excellent work.

Until March 6th the army rested at

THE CHAMPAGNE LUNCH GIVEN TO CRONJE BEFORE HIS DEPARTURE.

Osfontein. The staff scoured the country for provisions. Every nerve was strained to procure transport and stores to replace the lost convoy, and on the 6th of March the main army was ready to move again.

General French, with the Cavalry Division, moved five miles in advance of Osfontein to a place called Bank's Drift, on the north side of the Modder. Colvile's division were also on the north bank, between French and Cronje's old laager. On the opposite bank was General Tucker, known in the Army as the man who made his regiment drunk. The story is about the colonel of a regiment which fought in the Zulu War. After the fighting was done that regiment was brought down through Natal, and one day the men rejoiced on hearing that they were only half a march from a town. The colonel knew the meaning of this rapture. The men had not had so much as half a pint of beer for several months, and they openly and avowedly declared their intention of getting most gloriously drunk when they reached the town—a pleasant prospect for the townsfolk. But the colonel was a man of resource. He determined that if his regiment was to get drunk, and must get drunk, it should get drunk in private. Wherefore he sent an advance guard to the town and bought an enormous quantity of liquor. Then he halted his men five miles away from civilisation and distributed the intoxicants among them. The whole regiment succumbed, but the town was spared the horrors of the intoxication. And the next morning, while heads were still aching, the colonel made his men fall in and marched them straight through the town. Wherefore Tommy Atkins, who always respects originality, took considerable pride in General Tucker.

At Osfontein itself was Kelly-Kenny's division, which constituted the centre of the army, together with the Naval Brigade and the Corps troops with the heavy artillery.

The road to Bloemfontein was by no means open. Kruger and Steyn had brought their burghers to the sticking point sufficiently to induce them to fortify a position at a place called Driefontein, barring Lord Roberts's way to the Free State capital. The Australians were speedily in touch with them, and daily brought back reports of the state of the country ahead and the extent and nature of the Boer positions. These same Australians were just about the best scouts in the army. Time after time they penetrated into the enemy's lines without being seen; and more than once a Boer sentry would hear a slight noise quite close to him, and when the relief came at his shout, not a sign of the visitor would be found.

In short, the Australians were born guerilla fighters; and if time had been no object they would have exterminated the Boers by the simple process of stalking and shooting them a few at a time.

But time was an object. Lord Roberts only waited for his new transport to be organised in order to resume his march on Bloemfontein. On the 6th of March gallopers flew hither and thither. French brought his cavalry back to the other bank of the Modder. Lord Roberts appeared to be doing nothing at all.

A grizzled sergeant of the Seaforths thus delivered himself: "The Little Man is goin' to jump on them soon. How do I know? Because he looks as though he had nothing on his mind. Whenever 'Bobs's' face looks as though he was out for a picnic, somebody had better beware of the dog. That's how I know." And he set his section to clean its rifles.

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE SIEGE OF MAFEKING (*continued*).

AFTER the repulse of Vernon's attack on Game Tree Hill, the garrison of Mafeking daily expected an assault. It would have been an easy task for Snyman and his men, if they had acted with anything like courage and pluck, to penetrate the defences of the little town and to carry it by storm. It would have been even easier to do this at the outset of the siege.

Why, then, did Cronje first and Snyman afterwards decline to attack? The reason was not far to seek. The Boers knew well enough that Baden-Powell had only a handful of men, though they also knew that those men, most of whom had seen service against the natives in Rhodesia, were a particularly tough lot of veldt warriors. It was not, however, respect for the prowess of the garrison that restrained the Dutchmen from attacking. Nor was it dread of Baden-Powell; though the Boers had, at the outset of the war, been heard to declare that if they could only catch him, they did not care a snap of the finger for any other of the *rooibaatjes*.

The fact that operated to keep the burghers at a distance from the entrenchments of the little town was the fear that "B.-P." had sown the place thick with dynamite and cordite mines. He had, at an early period in the hostilities, sent out a letter to Cronje, telling him to keep his men back, because he (Baden-Powell) would not be responsible if they were blown up by the mines. And before the siege began the commander of the garrison had stuck little flags all round the town, and had warned the townspeople not to let their cattle stray within the spaces marked out by the flags; which information was duly conveyed by some of the Dutch inhabitants to their friends outside. The terrible results of the explosion of the two trucks of dynamite in the early days of October had given the Dutchmen rather a shock. They even went so far as to protest to Baden-Powell against the use of this explosive. To which the colonel replied that he had not invited them to come into Mafeking, and if they attempted to come in without his leave they must take the risks of traps and pitfalls by the way.

And the consequence was that, with the exception of the attack on the Police Fort by young Cronje, the Boers never once made an assault upon Mafeking until a time too late for it to be dangerous. And the Scouting Colonel smiled grimly in his sleeve. For, to say sooth, there were no mines outside Mafeking—at all events, none of British construction. The whole of the scare was a piece of bluff on the part of "B.-P."; and so naturally and quietly was it done that the slim Dutchmen were completely deceived. In point of fact, so were the townspeople. They also believed quite firmly that the approaches to their town were sown with mines, some of which went off if you trod on them, and

the others were exploded by means of electric wires communicating with the colonel's office. The newspaper correspondents telegraphed the intelligence home at the cost of many shillings a word.

Baden-Powell was a humourist ; and he thoroughly enjoyed this military Mrs. Harris that he had invented as a bogey to frighten the besiegers. What Commandant Snyman thought when he learned that the dreaded mines never existed, save in imagination, is not known.

But although the Boers did not dare to assault the little town, they attempted to reduce it in the way that seemed to them best. On the 3rd of January a big gun—either the one that Cronje had taken away with him or else a similar one—arrived from Pretoria, as well as several smaller guns. With these an active bombardment was resumed ; and for that it seemed impossible to kill or frighten the men of Mafeking, Snyman's artillerists directed their pieces upon the women's laager. In vain Baden-Powell sent out to inform his adversary of the fact. The Boer commandant invariably excused himself, apologised, and talked about accident. No amount of remonstrance seemed to have the least effect in staying the terrible bombardment of the women and little children.

THE OLD POLICE FORT, MAFEKING.

In one day in January a hundred

94-pound shells dropped into the women's quarters. A fragment of iron struck a little boy in the back and broke his spine. He died the next day in fearful agony, crying, "Bury me deep, mother, where the Boers can't get me."

The words of the little one were told in trench and camp. And many a hardy adventurer and many a warrior of three campaigns wiped the tears from his cheeks as he heard the story. And the rough troopers, stirred by the agony of that child's mother, swore that they would have the blood of Snyman, if they waited twenty years for it.

There can be no doubt that the barbarous conduct of Snyman's commandoes did much to embitter the war. A foe who deliberately and of malice aforethought shells a part of a town which contains only non-combatants—and these women and children—is, to the modern mind, a cowardly scoundrel or else a barbarian, and in any case unfit to live. Horrible was the condition of the wives and little ones of the men of Mafeking. And husbands and fathers suffered to see the agonies and privations of those whom they were bound to protect. Yet no one ever heard from the lips of either man or woman the word "Surrender."

The next event of the New Year was the destruction by the enemy of part of the native town or staadt. It had been understood on both sides, before hostilities commenced, that this was a white man's war. Now there were in Mafeking a large number of Kaffirs, mostly of the Baralong tribe. These men, like the Basutos, had been only too anxious to join the English in wiping out their ancient enemy. But Baden-Powell declined to allow this. He told them they might defend themselves if attacked, and that was all. The Boers were foolish enough to bring down upon themselves the active enmity of the natives by setting fire to some of the huts in the native staadt and by shelling that part of the town.

After this, nothing could restrain the Baralongs from reprisals. They were armed, most of them, with firearms, from the ancient Snider to the modern Lee-Metford; and, from the early part of January, parties of them would steal out and execute sniping movements at the expense of the besiegers. They were also very useful as thieves. In war, accomplishments bring to a man credit and glory which would bring him to handcuffs and the gaol if practised in time of peace. If there is one thing more detestable than another to the dweller in a sparsely populated colony it is the nigger cattle stealer. But now the skilful thieves of live stock found themselves patted on the back and made much of by the whites. It was no longer "that thieving black scoundrel"; it was "the clever nigger who keeps us in fresh meat."

The *modus operandi* of the Baralong cattle raiders was to steal out early in the morning to the veldt where the Boers grazed their cattle. Hiding places had to be used during the day; and from these the raiders observed the movements of their prey, and also the comparative fatness of the beasts. And as soon as night fell the party would steal out of their holes, and each man getting close up to the animal he had marked for his own, would manœuvre to turn the beast's head towards Mafeking. Then he would "get a move on" the animal; first a walk, as though it were merely grazing. Then, after causing the now half-stolen property to wander a safe distance from its owners, the Baralongs would rise to their feet and

drive their prey before them at a gallop, running the risk of long range shots from Boer rifles. But of this they took the risk, for they knew that if they were hit in the dark it could only be by accident. Cheering and hooting and yelling taunts of the most unsavoury description, the raiders would enter the British lines with

THE RUINS OF AN OFFICE, MAFEKING.

their plunder. And the next day there would be a great feasting in the native quarter; for Baden-Powell allowed natives who brought in Boer cattle to keep one bullock in every ten for themselves—a new application of the system of tithes that became extremely popular.

The besieged began to find the newly-arrived guns extremely unpleasant; so they took counsel how to rid themselves of the annoyance. For the big 94-pounder was not above 4,000 yards away from the town, and at that distance could simply play havoc. The way to stop the loss that had set in was by pushing out towards the Boer lines, so as to make them retire somewhat.

Now an operation of this kind has its dangers. It requires no great argument or demonstration to prove to the reader that if a garrison numbers 1,500 men and these are spread round a circle, the wider the circle the thinner the line. Baden-Powell would have preferred to keep his line as compact as possible, so as to be able to resist assault. But, having come to the conclusion that Snyman did not intend to try to storm the place, and the Boer artillery having become dangerous by reason of its proximity, he felt that the only

course open to him was to push his trenches out within rifle shot of the Boer guns. For it is an axiom that artillery cannot be used if it comes under rifle fire. The gunners must expose themselves more or less, and it will be easy enough for riflemen to pick them off, a few at a time. We had learnt this to our cost no later than the Battle of Colenso.

Wherefore some of the Police and some of the mixed troops, black and white, of the garrison dug trenches out and still further out. And at last, on the 16th of January, a trooper of the B.S.A. Police managed to pick off the gunner of the 94-pounder. The result was to silence that giant for several days, and to cause Snyman to remove it to a more respectful distance.

So the game went on. The British pushed out their trenches until they could reach the guns. Then the Boers took the guns further back. Until—though this did not take place for many weeks—the Boer artillery was so far away from the town that shells reached the women's laager only rarely.

The 19th of January was the 100th day of the siege, and the colonel commanding and the garrison took occasion to send to her Majesty a loyal message. A native despatch runner contrived to penetrate the Boer lines, and the message was telegraphed to the Queen.

Her Majesty promptly replied, expressing her thanks for the message, her sympathy with the besieged, and her confidence that they would hold out until they were relieved. And when that gracious message reached the little town on the veldt, it put new life and new heart into the men who fought and the women who suffered. For in those days the Queen was very near and very dear to her people.

Food did not begin to get scarce in Mafeking till towards the end of January. Then prices went up alarmingly—flour to 50s. per bag, potatoes to 40s. per hundredweight, eggs to 1s. a piece. As for liquor and other luxuries, these were at enormous prices. Fancy paying twopence or threepence each for that kind of cigarettes usually sold at one penny a packet. Of course, all necessaries were taken in hand by the authorities and distributed by them to the inhabitants in limited quantities. Fortunately Mafeking possessed among its citizens Mr. Julius Wiel, whose stores were a kind of universal provider's. The Messrs. Wiel had, with great forethought, laid in an enormous stock of provisions for man and beast, having some sort of guarantee from Lord Edward Cecil, as representing the Government. Some of the townspeople had been disposed to laugh when they saw the enormous stock being brought into the town. They supposed that the war would be over by Christmas, and here was Julius Wiel laying in food enough to last almost to midsummer. But those who laughed then were glad enough afterwards to save their bodies alive by the food procured from the long-headed contractors.

It was in January also that there began the series of historic conflicts for possession of the Brick Fields. The Brick Fields constituted the most vulnerable point of Mafeking, and they had been, by some oversight, abandoned at an early date. The enemy promptly took possession and constructed trenches there and pushed in towards the town, covered by these trenches and by the brick-kilns. They had also a Krupp gun, a 9-pounder, emplaced at the end of the Brick Fields.

When it was seen that from this point the Boers were able to inflict great loss and annoyance upon the town, by cannonade

and sniping fire, the garrison determined to wrest possession of this ground from the enemy. You remember that it was upon the Boer trenches in the Brick Fields that Fitzclarence and his squadron made their night attack with the bayonet. But the Boers merely resumed occupation of their trenches as soon as the sortie was over, and were soon as lively as ever. It became necessary to bring to bear upon the enemy at this point some more permanent method of repression.

The second week in January Captain Fitzclarence and one squadron of the Pro-

A SNIPING SHOT AT THE BIG GUN.

tectorate Regiment sallied out, and, driving the advance skirmishers of the enemy back a little, made room for our men to construct a trench about fifty yards in advance of our former advanced trench. Into this new position Sergeant Currie, with a detach-

ment of Cape Boys, was placed, and he soon made it particularly hot for the advanced trenches of the enemy. The nearest Boers happened to be a strong body of sharpshooters, in a brick-kiln something less than 200 yards distant. In about a week the Cape Boys had made this brick-kiln much too hot to be held. Then our men sapped out a little farther, until, by the end of January, they had driven the Boers back nearly half a mile.

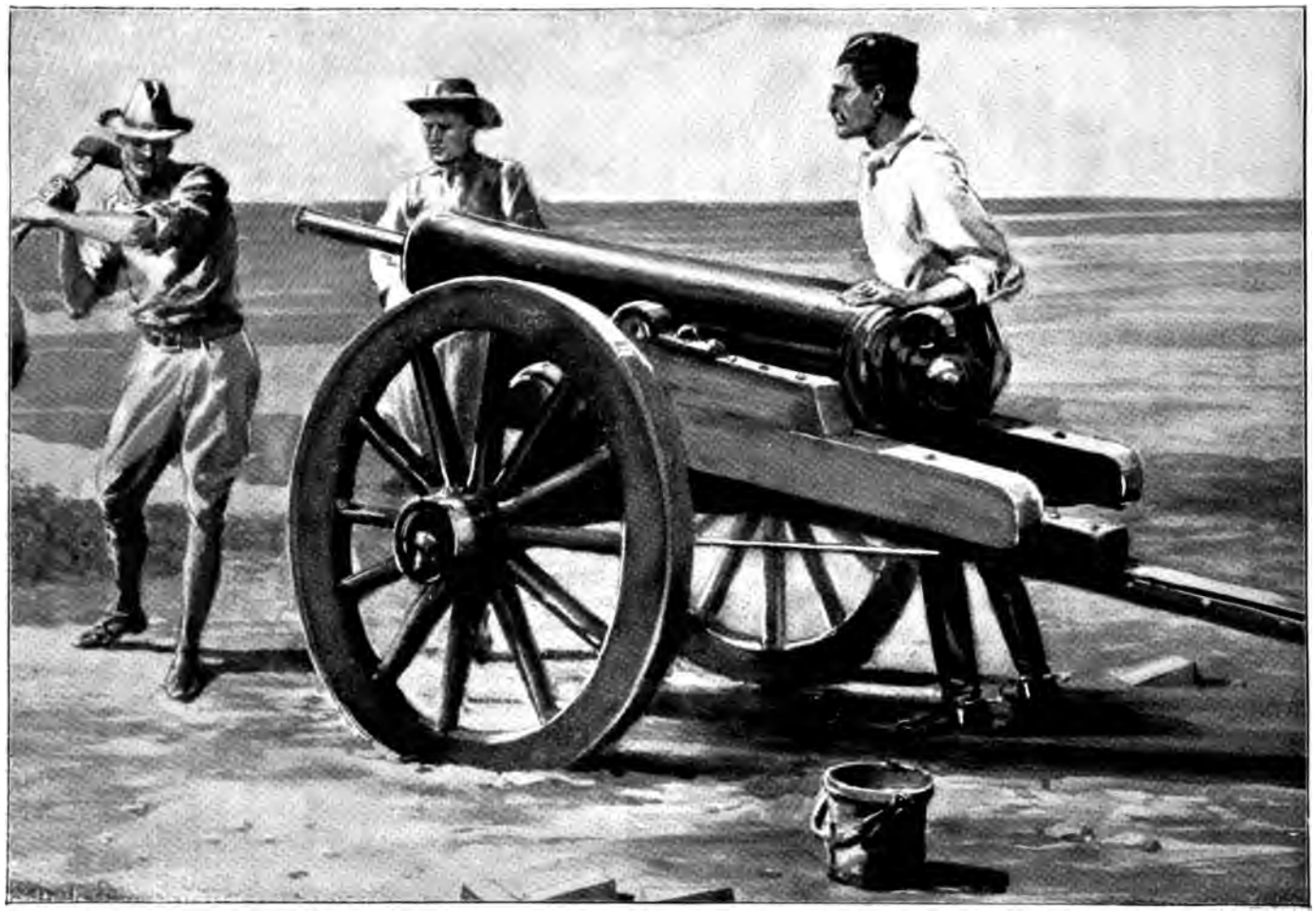
February found the situation practically unchanged. True, the garrison had driven the enemy farther and farther back ; but, on the other hand, the food of the town was getting scarcer and scarcer. Not that it had reached the famine point of the besieged town in Natal. Baden-Powell's men were never reduced quite to the same straits as White's soldiers. Nor did disease ravage the little town on the veldt as it had devastated the Diamond City and Ladysmith.

All the same, during the second week in February an order was promulgated that all horses shot by the enemy were to be handed over to the commissariat ; and, to quote Reuter's correspondent, "We stewed our fresh meat ration and tried hard not to think the taste peculiar. My ration for the day, handed to me this morning (February 10th), consisted of four hard weevily biscuits and a piece of meat which could not truthfully be called beef."

With horseflesh, typhoid and other low fevers broke out, especially in the women's laager. The men, being harder, stood the curious diet better than the more gentle sex. Besides, they had more hard outdoor work to do ; and everybody knows that a man who spends his day out of doors need not take much care about his diet. Moreover, this was not the only time that some of them had fed on horseflesh. Baden-Powell, amongst others, knew the taste of it quite well. For had he not, when out with a party of Hussars and irregulars in the Matabele war, been obliged to kill the horses, one or two at a time, and live on them and on nothing else for a week ?

Snyman, about the middle of the month of February, began to receive urgent messages from Pretoria, commanding him to assault and capture Mafeking. The commandant held a meeting of his burghers to discuss the matter. Such a proceeding seems highly absurd to nations accustomed to armies who obey without discussion the commands of their leaders. But to the Boers there was nothing absurd in calling a meeting of the rank and file to decide whether the orders from headquarters should be carried out or not. For every man was a citizen first and a soldier afterwards. He was a free burgher ; and he thought too much of himself to obey blindly the commands of anybody whomsoever. In fact, this was the weakness of the Boers as an army—a want of unity of action. In the end, the commando decided not to assault Mafeking, but to continue sitting round about it and to starve it out. In vain the Boer commander-in-chief told them that their rifles and cannon were urgently needed to stem the tide of invasion. The burghers declined either to leave the town or to assault it. Were they fools, that they should walk over dynamite mines set as traps for them by that slim Baden-Powell ? Not at all ; they would starve the English out, after battering the town to pieces with their heavy guns.

The children's grave-yard grew week by week ; but Snyman's men were not an inch nearer to the capture of Mafeking than they had been on the 16th of October.



LOADING THE OLD NAVAL GUN.

Indeed, they were less near. For had they assaulted boldly immediately they arrived before the town, had they kept up incessant night attacks, real and pretended, they must soon have discovered the serious weakness of the town's defences. But now the besieged thoroughly despised their enemy, and would have thought it foul shame to be captured by a set of scum of the earth, whose courage extended no further than the shelling of defenceless women and children from a safe distance.

Amongst other things done by the resourceful "B.-P." was the construction, or rather the refitting, of a gun. It appears that a British officer had discovered in the neighbourhood of Mafeking an ancient British naval gun dated 1815. Of course it was not rifled, it was an old-fashioned smooth-bore. And, of course, it would not throw shells, nor would it throw anything else very far. But it was another piece of ordnance, and its old-fashioned cannon balls might hit something some day. Wherefore the colonel of dragoons had it dug up from the spot where it was buried in a Kaffir kraal, polished it up, refitted it, and gave out for the benefit of all concerned that he had found another gun, out of which he had constructed a very useful howitzer. This official information had the effect of making the Boers believe that the garrison was much better off in the matter of artillery than it really was.

On the 13th of February the officers of the garrison gave a ball—a festivity rudely interrupted. Scarcely had the dancing begun than, as if by some instinct of annoyance, the Boers reinforced their advanced trenches and sent a galloping Maxim close up to our outlying posts in the Brick Fields. The bigger gun was also emplaced on the southern side of the town. Officers in uniform were whirling in the waltz women whose youth still left them charming, despite famine, when a terrific volley rattled over the town. The gallant men of the sword led their partners to chairs, excused themselves, walked slowly out of the ballroom, and then rushed as hard as they could for headquarters. Soon orderlies were galloping hither and thither. Baden-Powell was calmly whispering orders to this fort and that through his home-made telephone. The armoured train, always kept waiting with steam up, shunted puffingly along its line with ammunition for the defenders.

In half an hour every trench was manned, every rifle loaded. A few volleys swept the town and trenches, then all was still. But it was evident that the enemy was in force, and at 2 a.m. a signal was given—a signal distinctly heard by the defenders—and a volley, the most destructive yet experienced, broke forth from the advanced trenches of the Boers in the Brick Fields.

The British trenches immediately opposed to them were under the command of Inspector Marsh of the Police, and it must be confessed that the inspector was a worthy pupil of Baden-Powell. Amongst other inventions of his own for perplexing and discomfiting the enemy was a megaphone. Every now and then there would issue into the night a stentorian shout of "Men in the first trench fix bayonets!" The Dutchmen gripped their rifles and peered through their loopholes, expecting an onslaught with the cold steel. But none ever came, for the British had orders not to take the slightest notice of the megaphone's voice. All sorts of commands were issued in this way, until the Boers did not know whether they were on their heads or their heels. The Cape

Boys particularly enjoyed the joke, which they accompanied by insulting observations of their own.

The nearest that the Dutchmen came during the month of February was when they sapped out to the most advanced British trench in the Brick Fields. They began their engineering on the 14th of February, and in about a week, by dint of much labour on the part of Kaffirs whom they employed, they came in contact with the British trench. This movement was supported by a heavy shell fire from the Creusot gun; and so hot was this that Inspector Marsh and his Police and Cape Boys were unable to hold the foremost trenches. Fortunately, however, the Boers did not possess the necessary courage to induce them to make the final charge into the British position; and, as soon as darkness rendered the big gun harmless, the inspector led his men back and treated the Dutchmen to a few volleys that made them particularly glad to clear a little way back. Still, the sap constructed by them was a great danger, and to obviate it the British dug a traverse across the mouth of the sap. But the Dutchmen were in connection with our defences: that is, they could advance up their sap right into our trenches. So, after the lapse of about three days Sergeant Currie and Marsh led out a few men carrying dynamite. These inserted their dynamite at the junction of the sap and our trench, and the resultant explosion completely blocked up the opening by which the Dutchmen might have entered our lines.

CHAPTER LXV.

QUEEN VICTORIA AND HER PEOPLE.

SOUTH AFRICA was beside itself with joy at the news, "Ladysmith relieved." The enthusiasm of Cape Colony was, however, as nothing compared to that which was displayed at home. The news that reached the War Office on the morning of the 1st of March was brief, but all-sufficient. Within an hour of the time chronicled on the historic telegram from General Buller (9.5 a.m.) the news had spread like wildfire.

The English language is altogether inadequate to describe the condition of the British Empire on the 1st day of March. The proverbial oldest inhabitant was unable to call to mind anything like it—or anything approaching to it. No event of the Crimean War or the Indian Mutiny called forth such unanimous and spontaneous outburst of feeling, such exuberant display of patriotic fervour. It seemed as if gladness dwelt in every heart, gratitude on every tongue. The gallant stand made by General White and his stalwart army of heroes had somehow commended the beleaguered garrison to the hearts of the people.

To say that for one day the nation went delirious in its joy would be no exaggeration of the actual facts of the case. At the various post-offices the ticking of "Entered Ladysmith" was the cue for scenes of wild excitement from the various staffs. "The men did cheer, and the boys did shout, and the ladies they did all turn out." For the moment discipline was blown to the winds. And the glorious message was flashed to the ends of the earth—and all the ends of the earth where Britons dwelt rejoiced.

In the City of London interest centred, as usual, round the Mansion House, where huge and excited crowds demonstrated to their hearts' content. Cheers were raised for "Good old Buller!" And then he was cheered again by his well-known title of "Never say die!" Cheers for White and his troops! Cheers for Dundonald and his Composites! Cheers for Roberts! Cheers for the Queen! And when the crowd had shouted itself hoarse, it recuperated by singing "God save the Queen!" or "Soldiers of the Queen!" or "Rule, Britannia!" Then the cheering began again, and the City Imperials and Tommy Atkins were remembered!

Flags were hoisted on the public buildings and business premises, and on all manner of vehicles, and on umbrellas and walking-sticks. The Lord Mayor announced the news from the balcony, and the cheering was loud and long as he uttered the words: "This news makes our hearts leap with joy. At last we are satisfied that our sacrifice of blood and treasure has not been spent in vain." All day the city and the suburbs were given over to patriotic revelry! The metropolis of the nation of shopkeepers for once gave the lie to the old reproach about taking its pleasures sadly.

If London was hilarious, Manchester was wild with delight. Coming out of London Road Station, the first sight that met the eye was that of unnumbered flags and banners—from the windows, over the doorways, on cabs, and lorries, and hand-carts, and bicycles, and in the hands of foot passengers. The Union Jack and the Royal Ensign seemed omnipresent in Cottonopolis. And all along Piccadilly and Market Street good-humoured crowds, decorated with red, white, and blue ribbons and rosettes, and khaki decorations of various kinds, walked the thoroughfares. For the Manchester men were holding high holiday. The workmen at Mather and Platt's threw down their tools on the receipt of the good news, and expressed their determination to do "nowt for nobody" that day. The lads and lasses in the mills required no second hint to do the same nowt. Young England, in the persons of the grammar school boys, perambulated the streets waving flags and continuously cheering—except when now and again they formed a circle and sang a verse of the National Anthem.

QUEEN VICTORIA IN PHŒNIX PARK.

The coming men of light and leading—the students of Owens College—budding scientists, embryo medicals, devotees of classics and mathematics—were in no mood for listening to lectures.

The demonstrations in physics and chemistry were ruthlessly set aside for a demonstration of quite another character. In honour of the relief of Ladysmith the professors were relieved of further duties for that day. The students mounted the tramcars in numbers altogether inconsistent with the allowance of the city bye-laws. Displaying newspaper placards, they made a triumphal entry into the city — cheering, and evoking cheers all the way. Those who were unable to secure seats or standing room on the cars commandeered passing trollies, which served their purpose equally well. In the city they secured a plentiful supply of flags, whose waving was the signal for cheers and songs suitable to the occasion. They invaded the sanctity of the floor of the Exchange, and were not satisfied until they had a speech from the balcony. Staid business men joined in the acclamation, and for that day only were willing to give point to the old refrain (not very characteristic of the city) :—

"We've come all the way from Manchester,
And we want no work to do."

Liverpool was in no wise behind its rival seaport in the wholeheartedness of its rejoicing. On all its exchanges demonstration was the order of the day. Thousands of men and women gathered round the statue of the Queen, cheering and singing vociferously. The students of University College had a great procession. General Buller's portrait in the Exchange was crowned with laurel. Telegrams were despatched galore. Whenever a "gentleman in khaki" was espied he was collared and carried shoulder high by enthusiastic crowds. The inhabitants of the workhouse were treated to extra fare. Patriotic colours were worn almost universally—a lady without some such adornment was rarely to be seen—men who failed in some way or other to show their satisfaction at the good news were regarded with suspicion, and occasionally found it necessary to make an expeditious "trek."

And so it was throughout Lancashire —for had not the men of the South Lancashire Regiment borne a noble part in the conflicts which made the relief possible. Ashton and Heywood and St. Helen's and Bury and Bolton and Wigan, all showed their lively interest and satisfaction. The school children were given a holiday, and the mill-hands "bobbed." At the various collieries the news was sent down the mines by means of messages chalked on the coal-waggons, and far into the bowels of the earth the men cheered and sang, and sent back the record of their good wishes to Roberts, and Buller, and Kitchener.

Yorkshire was not one whit behind her rival of the Red Rose. York set her Minster bells ringing, and her citizens crowded her walls and streets in the spirit of exuberant loyalty. At Leeds the special feature was a procession of tumultuous students. Sheffield had a similar demonstration, plus a procession of jolly grinders in working attire. And all through her colliery towns and peaceful villages and hamlets, and across her wolds and dales and hills, there floated the flag that had been kept flying. And they showed their joy as their fathers had done in the olden times by lighting bonfires, and singing songs, and drinking the nut-brown ale.

In the North of England, Newcastle led the way in hearty gaiety—flags and shouting and a torchlight procession. And at Gateshead and Sunderland and Shields and Blyth, and all those busy towns of Northumbria, held high revelry and high holiday—in the spirit of the firm who placed

in their windows the legend, "LADYSMITH RELIEVED. SO ARE WE—FOR THE REST OF THE DAY."

In the Eastern Counties the rejoicings were unparalleled—from Lincoln to Southend was one scene of popular excitement, gay with bunting and redolent of gunpowder. Men of all creeds and parties joined together in acclaiming the Queen and her generals and in killing Kruger with their mouths.

In the Midlands—Birmingham leading the way as a matter of course—there was mad jubilation. From the municipal authorities downwards, all were tarred with the same brush. On 'Change, at Mason College, in the streets, at all the places of amusement—everywhere there was the same unique display of patriotic joy. Everything and everybody was decorated, the bands played, and the people shouted until there was a danger of combined hoarseness and deafness becoming epidemic. And as it was in the metropolis of the Midlands, so in all the lesser towns of that part of the country. "All play and no work" was the motto of the day.

It was the same in Wales. South Wales specially distinguished itself. In Cardiff demonstrations began early and ended late. Starting with a procession of greasy and begrimed apprentices, who had not time to doff their working clothes, this form of rejoicing culminated in a grand triumphal march through the chief streets to the Town Hall, from the balcony of which stirring addresses were given by several of the leading citizens. The indoor proceedings at the Exchance were enthusiastic; and the flags of all nations who were in the least friendly towards us were raised and saluted. Swansea and Newport and all the principal centres of trade and commerce were *en fête*. And here, as elsewhere, the large colliery population were second to none in their manifestations of loyalty—for many of their class and kin had marched and fought in the Army of Relief.

In Scotland, too, there was the same surrender to the spirit of the day; for was not Dundonald a good old Scottish name. At Edinburgh even the dignity and solemnity of the Parliament House were varied with ringing cheers. At Glasgow there were processions without number—the "black squad," the engineers of the Clyde, perambulated the city, and demonstrated on the floor of the Exchange. A body of 400 Govan riveters called at the University, intent on paying a visit to one of the German lecturers who had been accused of writing against Britain in Continental papers. The 400 mostly carried pickaxes and shovels and similar insignia, and made it known that they were intent upon introducing the professor to the waters of the Clyde. They were told that the German professor had resigned, upon which they prepared to tackle the principal, who had refused to grant a holiday to his class. There was a good deal of scuffling and sundry bruises and spilling of blood between the invaders and the students—but all in good part, for the students and the invaders were very much of one mind.

And last but not least in the rejoicings were the men of Devon, whose soldiers had been besieged and whose own general had been the instrument of their release—they felt it to be a special affair of their own, and acted accordingly.

"And not this land alone," but wherever the flag of Britain waved there was the same demonstration—the same loyalty to the Queen, the same praise of the soldiers of the Empire, and the same

gladness that the two towns had been relieved.

Telegrams were despatched to the Queen, the Government, and the generals, with an extravagance bordering on prodigality.

New Zealand was amongst the first to convey congratulations in a brief telegram ; then the citizens of Moncton, New Brunswick, held a mass meeting and passed patriotic resolutions. The German residents in New Hanover expressed their loyalty to the throne. These were followed by messages from Trinidad and Jamaica, from Calcutta and Montreal and Toronto, from Victoria and Newfoundland, from Sydney and Melbourne and Brisbane, from Gibraltar and Bermuda.

There was no mistaking the meaning of the fervid demonstrations which encircled the earth. All round the earth the flag that had been kept flying was displayed, and the multitudes of born and adopted sons of the Empire sang "God save the Queen."

The men of the *Powerful* came home as fast as their good ship could bring them. Portsmouth shouted itself hoarse. A parade of the crew was ordered in London and at Windsor. The Heir Apparent to the Throne and the Lords of the Admiralty inspected the saviours of Ladysmith ; and then the bronzed fellows marched through the City to a mighty chorus of cheering.

Upon which the comment of a certain A.B. was : "Lots o' shoutin' about nuthin'. The 'ole turn-out was not a bad spree if it 'adn't a-bin for the want o' bacca. We was redooced to smokin' tea-leaves!"

But the people of England were not content to let the bluejackets minimise their deeds, and for many a day Lambton of the *Powerful* shared with Sir George White the cheers of an excited populace.

For many years past Queen Victoria had spent the days of early spring on the Continent. This year she determined that she would remain among her own people.

She came to London on the 8th of March, a week after "Ladysmith Day."

And her people had prepared for her a hearty reception, a reception that was all the heartier for the announcement that appeared in the morning's papers that her Majesty would visit Ireland, and that in recognition of their indomitable pluck the men of the Irish Regiments should all have the privilege of wearing the shamrock on St. Patrick's Day.

London rose to the occasion. Everywhere the streets were gaily decorated—favours of red, white, and blue, and the portrait of the Queen were extensively worn—and all along the route from Paddington to Buckingham Palace the crowds were immense. And the whole affair was the more impressive, seeing that the royal progress was almost unannounced. In fact, the Queen's visit to her capital after the relief of Ladysmith was a triumph such as few monarchs have ever attained. The interest and the enthusiasm were as great as at the time of the Diamond Jubilee.

But with one mighty difference. The Diamond Jubilee was largely a military pageant, soldiers lined the streets, and everything pointed to the strength of the Empire. Now no soldiers lined the streets—the people kept order for themselves. It was a pageant demonstrating a monarch's trust and a people's affection. And it showed the strength of the Empire far better than any display of military power could do.

The crowd began to gather early in the morning. But there was no lack of entertainment. The merchants of the streets

LADYSMITH DAY.

did a roaring trade in the national colours —in buttons upon which were portraits of the generals and other popular officers at the front, and in the portraits of "the dear old lady." The medical students were in great form—hatless they came, each with a Union Jack or British Ensign in his hand—excitedly cheering for the Queen and her Army, with an occasional groan for Kruger. The streets were packed, but they cleared a way for themselves and for the modest little procession of the Queen; and then, by a little good-humoured management on the part of the authorities, they were got into order as a guard of honour in London Street. How they shouted — and sang — and tooted! And how the bystanders enjoyed the fun.

The crowd in the neighbourhood of Paddington Station was a mixture of all sorts and conditions of men, women, and children. But a more orderly, or a more unanimous assemblage, was never gathered together in London. It was noisy, it was hilarious, it was tumultuous—joking, laughing, cheering—but as the police passed the word along, "The Queen will be here in a minute," the crowd sorted and straightened itself, and made a clear way for the royal cavalcade. As if by one common consent there was for one minute a hush—a respectful silence, and then, as the Queen appeared, a mighty shout, Hurrah! Hurray! Hurroo! The Queen was in the midst of her own people once again.

From Paddington to Hyde Park the route was thickly lined by loyal demonstrators, and in the Park itself the world of fashion vied with the world outside its ranks in giving a unique reception to the Queen. Such a display was never witnessed in the Park. Red, white, and blue and "khaki" were everywhere. To imagine it you must picture to yourself an enlarged school-treat, or a beanfeast—the carriages of the well-to-do were decorated with Union Jacks and Royal Standards; the coachmen were decorated with rosettes and ribbons, so were the horses; the collars of the dogs were of the same pattern; the children carried flags and were bedecked with loyal favours; and sprightly maidens, and staid matrons, and stately dowagers sported the national colours. And as the Queen passed by there was an unfolding and fluttering of banners and handkerchiefs, and a continuous shouting and clapping of hands.

At Buckingham Palace the members of the two Houses of Parliament had gathered within the railings, and greeted her Majesty with uncovered heads, and loud cheers, and the singing of the National Anthem, which was joined in by the vast crowd outside.

Later in the day the Queen drove through the West End and the City. In the evening a huge crowd assembled outside the Palace and demonstrated to their hearts' content.

On the following day the Queen again had a long drive; and in the evening there was a renewal of the serenade at the Palace—singing and cheering were the order of the night—and the crowd was made happy by the appearance of the Queen at one of the windows; and a huge procession marched away up the Mall and into the City, cheering and shouting all the way.

This was largely an Irishman's war. Lord Roberts and General French—the two unbeaten leaders—were both Irishmen, and so was General White, the defender of Ladysmith. And have we not recorded the fact that, as ever, Irishmen were in the van of the fight. Wherever hard blows

had to be given and taken, Pat came to the front and distinguished himself. And especially, as we have seen, in connection with those fights that immediately preceded and made possible the relief of Ladysmith, Irish valour was to the fore.

The Queen telegraphed to the general in command: "I have heard with the deepest concern of the heavy losses sustained by my brave Irish soldiers. I desire to express my sympathy, and my admiration of the splendid fighting qualities which they have exhibited throughout these trying operations."

On April 5th an Army order was issued stating that "her Majesty the Queen, having deemed it desirable to commemorate the bravery shown by the Irish regiments in the recent operations in South Africa, has been graciously pleased to command that an Irish Regiment of Foot Guards be formed. The regiment will be designated the 'Irish Guards.'"

On March 8th the Queen announced her intention to visit Ireland early in April. The visit was non-political, and was entirely of the Queen's own initiative —one of those tactful and happy inspirations which had so often led her Majesty to do the right thing, at the right time, in the right manner, and in the right way: and though a few irreconcilables tried to stand in the way, the old, chivalrous Irish nature asserted itself.

And Erin prepared a hearty and loyal welcome for Victoria.

The Queen had been in Ireland in 1849, 1853, and in 1861, and her memories thereof were very pleasant.

It was on the 2nd of April that her Majesty left Windsor for her spring outing, her destination being "dear, dirty Dublin."

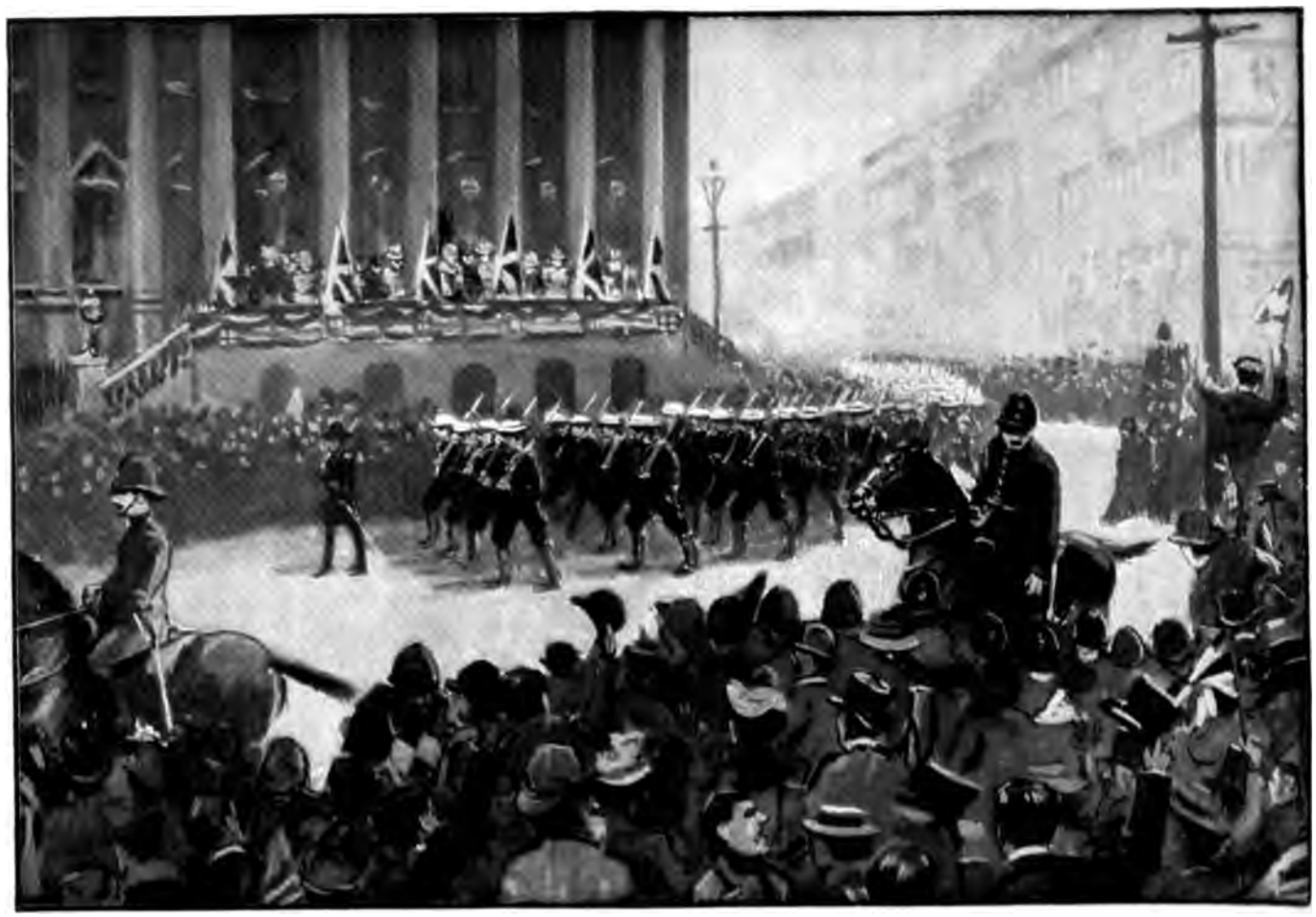
Landing at Kingstown on the 4th, she was presented with a loyal and loving address; and her first words were, "I am very glad to be in Ireland again." The Lord Mayor met her at the boundary of Dublin, and on bended knee offered her the keys and sword of the ancient capital of the Emerald Isle. In her written reply to the Address of the Corporation, her Majesty said that she had come to Ireland for change and rest in a country of which she had the happiest recollections: but specially had she come to see again the motherland of those brave men who had recently borne themselves in defence of her crown and empire with a cheerful valour, as conspicuous now as ever in their glorious past.

Her Majesty had but a small escort. She trusted the Irish people—and the people decorated their streets and houses, and in their thousands cheered her to the echo.

One motto specially attracted notice, "The Wives and Children of the Dublin Fusiliers salute their Queen." The Queen's entry was a continuous triumph. The students of Trinity College were not the only boisterous boys in Dublin—and "a hundred thousand welcomes" were tendered with hearty goodwill. There was no whisper of discord.

Eight thousand children massed in Phœnix Park, and sang the National Anthem: and the people were all of one accord.

During her three weeks' stay, the Queen took pains to show herself to the people on every possible occasion. No section was either forgotten or slighted. She specially interested herself in the industries of the congested districts; and the work of the cotters, who rear sheep and shear and dye the wool thereof, and then spin and weave it in their own homes, was brought prominently before



THE NAVAL BRIGADE PASSING THE MANSION HOUSE.

her notice. And of course she was interested in the lovely lace and the well-known poplins. And of course, as a practical woman, she patronised the Irish fabrics, and let it be well known that she would be delighted to hear that the industries of Ireland were becoming more appreciated by all classes of her loyal and dutiful subjects.

But the best of friends had to part. And as a parting gift she handed £1,000 to the Lord Mayor for the poor of his city, and expressed her intention to present a piece of plate to the Corporation.

In a letter to the Irish people, her Majesty declared that she had been deeply touched by the reception given to her; everywhere she had been kindly and warmly welcomed, and would carry away with her a most pleasant and affectionate memory. She prayed that goodwill and harmony might prevail throughout the land, and that the people might be happy and prosperous. This was the royal version of "God save Ireland."

It is impossible to say whether the people of "Ould Oirland" were most touched with the sympathetic queenly visit or with the order that in future all Irish soldiers should be allowed to wear the shamrock on St. Patrick's Day. For years the rank and file of Irish regiments had desired to wear their Saint's emblem on his festal day. And for years the War Office, *more suo*, had refused the liberty. But now the Queen herself, by a stroke of the pen, swept away the cobwebs of the War Office quill-drivers, and accorded to her gallant Irishmen the privilege they desired.

The visit and the order were exactly suited to appeal to a sentimental and ardent people. And never in the history of the kingdom was there such a universal wearing of the green. He who wore it not on St. Patrick's Day, 1900, whether Saxon or Celt or Gael, was suspected of want of sympathy with the Queen and her empire.

There is a tradition that when the Babylonians built an edifice which they intended to stand for ages, they mixed the mortar with human blood. They took slaves and slew them, and used their lives for the building of palaces.

And who shall doubt that bloodshed is a great unifier? The empire of the Queen was becoming day by day a more solid and enduring fabric as Irishmen and English, Scots and Welsh, Australians and Canadians, poured out their blood to cement it together. Not the blood of slaves, but of freest men. And not running upon the sacrificial altar of the lustful gods of Babylon, but upon the altar of loyalty and patriotism.

As for the Queen and her people, never since Victoria ascended the throne had she been so thoroughly beloved and revered as she was at this time. Her people acquired for her the same personal loyalty and devotion that their forefathers had felt for the great Queen Bess. "God Save the Queen" became something more than a National Anthem—it became a personal petition, offered up to the Throne of Grace on behalf of a woman who, in time of stress and trial, had shown herself the guide and mother of her people.

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE MARCH ON BLOEMFONTEIN—POPLAR GROVE.

AFTER a week of rest and reorganisation Roberts was on the move. His immediate objective was Bloemfontein, and he purposed to deal with the enemy who barred the way in this fashion :

French, with the cavalry and some mounted infantry (including the mounted men of the C.I.V.'s) should make a wide sweep to the south, turning east after about a six-mile march, and then north, which would bring him in the rear of the enemy. General Kelly-Kenny should follow up the cavalry with his infantry division ; but he was not to join in the turning movement : he was to march against the front of the Seven Sisters. The other road was along the Modder valley. And the British commander intended to sweep along on both banks of the Modder, with Tucker and his division on the south bank, and the Highland Brigade, Smith-Dorrien's brigade (forming the 9th Division under Colvile), and the Naval Brigade on the north bank.

If the plan of campaign succeeded in its entirety, the Boers would be cut off in the rear by the cavalry, attacked in the front by Kelly-Kenny, while the Highlanders and the sailors would effectually stop them from crossing to the north bank and escaping that way.

At 2.30 a.m., on the 7th of March, the cavalry stood to their horses, and at 3 a.m. they moved out slowly to the south. The Boers were entrenched on a number of kopjes near a place called Poplar Grove, east of Lord Roberts's army, having their left protected by a small group of hills called the Seven Sisters. Poplar Grove Farm, from which the position took its name, was behind the centre of their line ; and they had constructed with tremendous labour trenches and earth-works. The right of their position was a big flat-topped mountain, called Leeuw Kop,* on the north bank, whose slopes ran down to the river, and on the south bank was a ridge of kopjes which formed their centre. The whole position was protected in the front by lesser hills, rough on the surface.

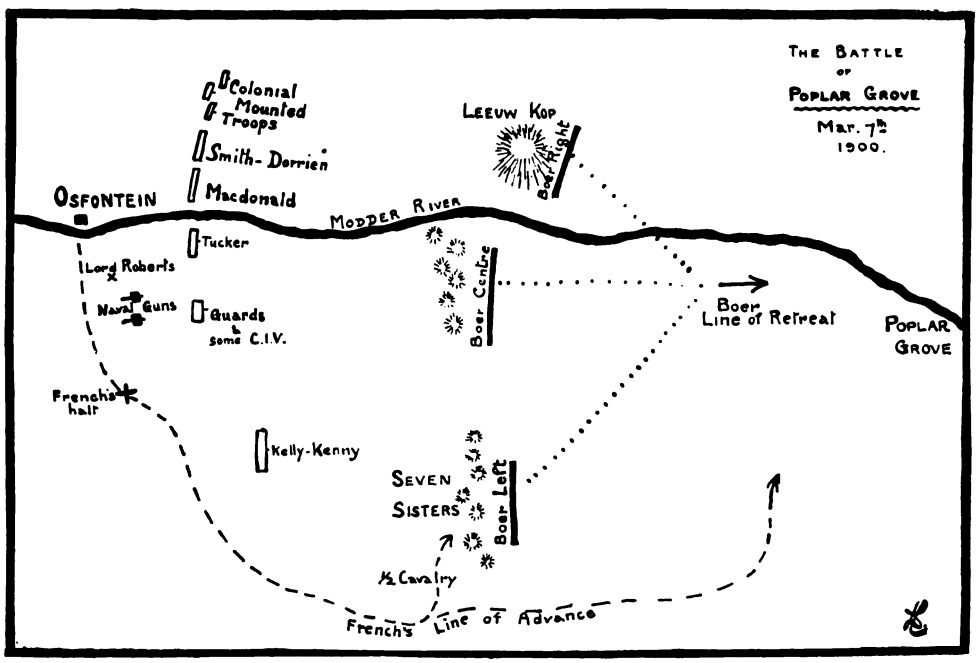
When French's division marched out of camp it was dark ; and, after travelling a little over two miles, the general halted. In so doing he was not following his instructions ; because Lord Roberts had calculated that by the time it was daylight the cavalry would be so far on their way that their enveloping movement would be almost completed—at all events, so far advanced that the Boers would be unable to escape. For two hours or more French stood still, fearing to move further in the darkness in an unknown country ; and this, although he had with him the scout, Burnham, who could find his way about in the darkness better than most men at noontide. The delay had serious consequences.

The 4·7's opened the ball just before six a.m. They had been shifted to some low kopjes south of the Modder and east of Osfontein just after midnight, and Lord Roberts and the Headquarters' Staff took

* *Leeuw* is pronounced "loo."

their stand by the sailormen. As soon as it was well light the war balloon reported a laager behind the Seven Sisters kopjes. The Naval guns loaded with common shell, and in very few minutes found the range and dropped their projectiles into the enemy's camp.

Colvile, at the same time, put his division in motion on the other side of the stream, and the Highlanders were directed straight towards the big flat-topped mountain before described.



PLAN OF THE BATTLE OF POPLAR GROVE.

French had moved at daybreak. As soon as he got his horses in motion he put them to the gallop, and by 7.30 a.m. appeared on the Boer left; but he ought ere this to have been full on the enemy's rear. The Dutchmen saw the swarm of brown-clad cavalry descending upon their flank, and for the first time their guns spoke. Two Krupp guns and a pom-pom opened a vicious fire from Seven Sisters, and with their usual accuracy pitched shells among French's squadrons as they galloped across the veldt. It was matter of admiration how the Boer gunners worked their pieces. A gun would follow a regiment of cavalry moving at full gallop for a mile, never letting go of it, but continually pitching common shell and shrapnel over and amongst the horses.

Hitherto the Naval men had been unable to discover the emplacements of the enemy's guns. But now those positions were unmasked, and the 4·7's began to turn their unremitting attention to the artillery of the enemy. With tremendous rapidity shell after shell hurtled through the air and dropped into and around the Boer gun emplacements. So rapid was

the fire that sometimes two shells out of the same gun would be in the air at the same time. "A little more to the left." "Ay, ay, sir." "Fire! Oh!—good shot." A shell from a 4·7 had dropped within a foot or two of one of the Krupp guns, scattering the gunners, and strewing the ground with maimed and dead men. Also, it disturbed the gun mounting, and that Krupp never spoke again that day.

With a cheer for their own success, the sailormen began to hurl out common shell and lyddite with increased rapidity and venom. After about twenty minutes more of shelling they discovered the exact position of the other Krupp, and soon three well-aimed shells dropped right into its emplacement. Another well-aimed missile slew the crew of the pom-pom. The Boer gunners could stand it no longer, and in haste began to remove their cannon and hurry to the rear.

Meanwhile French's cavalry, still at a hard gallop, developed their attack. Half of them turned off sharp to the left and made straight for the flank of the Seven Sisters; the other half continued east for a mile or so, and then bore up round the rear of the left of the Boer position. On the north bank the Highlanders and the victorious brigade of General Smith-Dorrien pushed along with great ardour, and on their left, forming a protecting band, a large body of Colonial horsemen galloped to get round to the left of the big, flat-topped kopje.

There was no attack except by artillery fire upon the Boer centre. Tucker's brigade, pushing along the south bank of the river, halted as soon as within rifle shot. And the Guards' Brigade, under Pole-Carew, simply sat down to guard the Naval guns. Kelly-Kenny had slewed round, swinging his right up and making a pivot of his left, until his division faced the Seven Sisters, upon which he marched with one brigade as straight as he could go. And at 8 a.m. battle was fully joined.

Colvile's division, on the north bank, had the assistance of some field batteries, which trotted forward every now and then, unlimbering and pitching shrapnel upon the lower slopes of Leeuw Kop. Riflemen were there, lying invisible behind boulders, whence they took long shots at the kilts of Macdonald's men.

It was wonderful to see the confidence with which this brigade swept to the attack. It had, perhaps, the hardest position assigned to it. It had been decimated at Magersfontein, and cut up at Paardeberg; yet here, under the eye of "Bobs" and the leadership of the valiant Hector, it strode forward like a brigade that had never known a check. They took a lot of licking, these Highlanders. With set faces on they pressed, confident that if the Dutchmen would only wait for them, ten minutes with the bayonet would repay all debts. The kilts swished as the thin lines moved forward. No pipes played them to battle, for Macdonald had prohibited music until such time as he should judge the brigade to have re-established itself. And, being a Highlander himself, he set a high standard.

At 8.30 French's division was in the rear of the Seven Sisters, and then the Boers on that side began to trek. They did not retreat absolutely straight to the rear, but fell back to the rear of their centre. Away went the cavalry, not in pursuit, but continuing the circuit, so as to envelop the Boer main body and cut off its retreat. The line of that retreat was now very narrow. To begin with, it was confined to the south bank of the river.

Colvile's mounted Colonials, the 9th Division, and the Naval guns rendered it impossible for them to cross at any neighbouring drift. Then French had cut round to the rear of their left, and was rapidly making for the rear of their centre. This, therefore, only left open the ground between the south bank of the river and the head of French's column.

True, the Dutchmen might have stayed where they were and fought it out; but the fate of Cronje was before their eyes, and they did not dare to allow themselves to be enveloped. Moreover, they would have been exceedingly unwise if they had allowed French to get right behind them. Although it is not to be doubted that if these commandoes had stood at bay they would have made an excellent fight of it, there is also no doubt that once they had allowed French to touch the river with the head of his column, every man must have been killed or captured.

So they did all that was to be done—namely, they withdrew their guns, mounted them on waggons drawn by teams of ponies, packed up such stores as they might in so short a time and hastened eastward through the gap still left between French's division and the river. But that gap was rapidly growing smaller. French had his men on the gallop, as he had had them all day, and they began to get perilously near to the Dutch column. The horse artillery of the Cavalry Division galloped on, unlimbered, fired at the retreating column, limbered up, and repeated the performance time and time again.

The swift movements of French's troopers began to make an impression upon the Dutchmen. They had begun their retreat in an orderly and steadfast manner. They had packed most of their valuable stores. But as Hussars and Dragoons, Lancers and Colonial horsemen, came flying across the veldt, threatening to cut the column in halves, waggons were abandoned, stores were thrown away, everything was done to lighten the horses and augment the speed of the retreat.

Had it not been for French's long halt, there is little doubt that he would have cut the whole column off, and there would have been another big capture. And, even with the late arrival, with his horses in decent condition the cavalry general would still have accomplished his task. As it was, he manœuvred the Boers out of a position from which they could only have been forced by severe fighting at heaviest expense.

The position occupied by the Boer army might well have cost us several hundred lives. As the day turned out, there was no fighting to speak of. The infantry never charged all day, nor did the cavalry get near enough to use their carbines, much less their sabres, with any effect. We lost four killed and forty-two wounded. The operation had now resolved itself into a flight and a pursuit.

The mounted infantry, especially the section of the C.I.V.'s, went ahead on the trail. More than once, by sheer hard riding, by merciless spurring of horses, the mounted riflemen came up with parties of Dutchmen, dismounted, and let fly damaging volleys. The regular cavalry also pursued keenly; but they did not always display the same caution in scouting as the C.I.V.'s and the Colonials. There was a good deal of bull-at-a-gate tactics. Subalterns and captains would insist upon charging, troop and squadron, straight ahead, as though this were the Long Valley or Salisbury Plain, and there were no lead in the cartridges.

To wit, there was a squadron of the 9th Lancers led by a captain, to the number of thirty-five, who rode straight ahead when the Dutchmen were quitting the Seven Sisters position. The leader seemed to take it for granted that as the Boers were on the run they must be absolutely disorganised, and could not have left anybody behind to protect their rear. Slap-dash went the squadron. There is a tiny hill—had you not better send two men out to the right front and two to the left front?

This was the question suggested by caution. But no such thought as cautiousness ever entered the head of any regular cavalry officer until his squadron had been cut up a time or two. Without a single scout, on went the squadron, and had begun to ride over the lower slopes of the hill when volleys spat out from the top and emptied twenty-three saddles out of the thirty-five. This foolishness accounted for exactly half the casualties of the day.

A WOUNDED COMRADE.

On the other side of the river, Colvile's division was having an easy time.

Hitherto this fine body of infantry had received more than its share of knocks. Now it gained a little glory cheaply.

The Highland Brigade marched nearest the river, having on their left the brigade of Smith-Dorrien, with the Shropshires and Canadians in front, and the Gordons and Cornwalls in support. Of this brigade, the Shropshires formed the right of the firing line, in touch with the left of the Highland Brigade, and the Canadians continued the line to the left. There was a kopje opposite to the Shropshires, a kopje with a Krupp gun on it. "The Shropshires will advance and capture the hill in front." This was the command; and the Shropshires looked at the steep hill ahead of them, just glanced to see that the bayonets were loose in their scabbards, and immediately felt all the rights of ownership in the Krupp gun.

Meanwhile the Canadians had swept round to the left. They were to assault one face of the hill, while the Shropshires made a frontal attack up another face. It was a march of some miles for the Canadians, over rough ground and under a broiling sun. But the men of Paardeberg fame took the matter lightly enough. They covered at least ten miles under arms and in full equipment. Yet not a single man fell out by the way. They were proud men, those Canadians—and every man of them would rather have dropped dead from sunstroke than admit that he was too exhausted to march further. And so, in solid, close-packed ranks the battalion stepped out on its flanking march, only hoping that, after all, Canada might be first at the gun.

The Shropshires marched slowly forward, lying down occasionally. They were in no great hurry, because they were to begin their climb about the same moment that the Canadians were timed to reach the left side of the kopje. Colvile marched the battalion within range of the top the hill, and let them lie down and indulge in a little fancy shooting. To the great surprise of the Englishmen, the Boer marksmen refused to be drawn. Not a shot answered the repeated challenges of the Lee-Metfords.

It was slow—much too slow for the commander of the Shropshires. Wherefore he pushed his men forward a little, and again cast them to the earth with rifles pointed at the summit of the hill. Then he threw them forward again—forward and up. For the Boer rifles were still silent, and their gun had ceased to boom.

By successive short rushes the Shropshires attained to within a thousand yards of the hill top, and then it began to dawn on their commander that perhaps the enemy had deserted the position. So he sent a cloud of skirmishers ahead to push on as quickly as might be, and see whether it was so or no. Up went the skirmishers, rushing from cover to cover, showing just enough to draw the fire of the enemy, but no more.

The crest of the hill grew nearer and nearer. Two hundred yards—then one hundred—then only twenty. Then a Shropshire lad stood upright on the crest, at the edge of the great plateau, and raising his helmet on his rifle waved it in triumph.

As on their left, so on their right; the Boers, seeing a considerable force encircling their position, and mindful of the fate of the Fighting General, had simply bolted. And in this case they had bolted with far more haste than their comrades on the other bank of the river. For they had left behind their Krupp gun—one of

the very few instances in which the Dutchmen had fled without taking all their artillery with them.

The Shropshires flew up the hill and pounced upon their trophy. They would have preferred for the Boers to stand and make a fight for it; but the capture of so considerable a prize as a Boer gun made up for many disappointments, the want of a fight amongst others. Somebody chalked the number of the regiment upon the gun, as the manner has been in the British army since cannon began to be. The Canadians, during all this time, were marching to complete their circle. They completed it, only to find that the elusive enemy had slipped through before the net was spread, and to find their brothers in arms, the Shropshires, looking very much more festive than the Shropshires usually permitted themselves to look.

But there was no time to be lost in mere rejoicings. The enemy had run. It was the business of Lord Roberts's army to keep them on the run. The 9th Division marched on, therefore, along the north bank of the Modder, hoping vainly to come up with the flying foe. On the other side of the river the Boers, who had formed the centre and the left of their army, had retreated on another line of kopjes about four miles to the rear. Their little, hardy, sure-footed ponies carried them off at a rate much quicker than the gallop raised by the British horsemen for the pursuit. They settled down on this ridge behind boulders and in great clefts in the ground, hoping that the guileless *rooineks* would charge straight after them.

But the *rooineks* were now under the command of a man who intended to fight in his own way, and not in the enemy's way. Instead of charging the second line of kopjes, the field-marshal merely sent off an order to French to make a curve round the next ridge in the same way as he had done in respect of the last position. The Silent Cavalryman promptly put his horses in motion. The poor beasts were tired enough with their heavy day's work, that had lasted almost twelve hours. They had to be flogged with sabres to make them gallop at all.

But gallop they did in the end; and sweeping wide round to the right, so as to be right out of range of the riflemen on the ridge, they again made to enclose the Boer army between themselves and Kelly-Kenny's infantry division. There was some dropping fire as a pom-pom turned its attentions on the squadrons. French was in peril himself for a few minutes, having ridden forward with the staff to survey the ground and having come under a heavy fire from some concealed rifles about 1,000 yards away. But once more the turning movement accomplished in a few hours what a frontal attack would have occupied a whole day in doing. The turning movement, in fact, frightened the Boers out of a position with no loss to ourselves, where a straightforward infantry attack might have been repulsed time after time, and would certainly have entailed heavy loss.

The Boers would not wait to be rounded up. They saw the hundreds of horsemen on their left galloping hard to cut them off. And as soon as they saw it, neither threat, command, nor persuasion could hold them to their position. Their morale was for a time detroyed. Away they went, horse and man. They did not tarry by the way. President Steyn himself was there, and he did his best to persuade his burghers to stop and fight. But they had had enough for the moment.

LORD ROBERTS AT LUNCH ON THE BATTLEFIELD.

They left behind waggons and stores and wounded. Many a fat sheep and many a draught bullock graced the spits of the Guards and the C.I.V.'s and the Colonial troopers. Especially the Australians came in for their share; for if there was one thing more than any other thing which made an Australian a valuable acquisition to an army, it was that he could forage. A certain Englishman with the army said, that if you put an Australian in the middle of a great plain, as bare as the palm of your hand, he would presently emerge with a ham on each side of his saddle-bow, several ducks, and most likely a sheep. Let it be said, also, that these same men of the great island continent were the best of comrades—never did they hesitate to share with their less fortunate fellows the good things that Providence

and their own keen wit had put in their way.

Amongst other things that happened on the day of the Poplar Grove, was the capture of the military *attachés* of Russia and the Netherlands, of whom the latter bore a name exceedingly British—it was Thomson—and the other a name conspicuously Slavonian. Lieutenant-Colonel Wasili Gourko was his name, style, and title, and he had a few words to say about the conduct of his hosts in leaving him stranded. The two *attachés* had provided themselves with a mule waggon, and when the Boers hurriedly quitted the second position they took the mules out of this waggon to use them for their own transport.

General French was at this time following the retreat with seven horse batteries, which made matters very lively. The batteries galloped after the fugitive column, unlimbered, cast shells amongst the waggons and threw shrapnel at the horses. Then, when the Boers were getting out of their range, the batteries limbered up again and once more galloped after the flying enemy. Indeed, had it not been for the fact that the draught animals had not yet recovered from their forced march to Kimberley—a recovery considerably retarded by the scanty food they had since lived on—they might have destroyed the Boer army and captured every single gun and waggon.

Altogether, the infantry covered twenty miles that day, bivouacking only when the evening began to close in. The cavalry had done considerably more owing to the circuits they had been obliged to make in accomplishing their two turning movements. Altogether, it was a most creditable march, and would have been a fine performance had the army been moving along decent roads in England on a cool day. And when one takes into account the fact that the march had been considerably impeded, and that there had been something in the nature of a rear-guard action, the performance of Lord Roberts's army on the 7th of March becomes little short of marvellous.

Had General French not waited for daylight, it is quite possible, and almost probable, that the whole of the Boer force would have been "rounded up," as the Australians had it.

One thing the army heard with grief—almost with rage. Kruger himself, the arch-Boer, had slipped through their fingers. He had escaped them by the bare margin of two hours. This annoyed the rank and file of the army sorely. They had not forgotten that Kruger was the head and chief of the Transvaal Boers at Majuba time—Kruger, Joubert, and Cronje. As for Cronje, he was safe now. Joubert, most courteous and chivalrous of foes, was, so it was reported, lying on a sick bed at Pretoria—a sick bed from which he might never rise again. And now, the third of the triumvirate had missed his just doom by a little matter of two hours.

Wherefore the British army wrapped itself in its overcoat and softly swore itself to sleep.

CHAPTER LXVII.

NEGOTIATIONS—THE BATTLE OF DRIEFONTEIN.

AFTER the capture of Cronje and the relief of Ladysmith the Presidents of the two Boer States offered peace. The offer came addressed to the Marquis of Salisbury, as Foreign Secretary, and was a somewhat extraordinary document. The following is the text of it :—

"BLOEMFONTEIN, *March* 5, 1900.

"The blood and the tears of the thousands who have suffered by this war, and the prospect of all the moral and economic ruin with which South Africa is now threatened, make it necessary for both belligerents to ask themselves dispassionately, and as in the sight of the Triune God, for what they are fighting, and whether the aim of each justifies all this appalling misery and devastation.

"With this object, and in view of the assertions of various British statesmen to the effect that this war was begun and is being carried on with the set purpose of undermining her Majesty's authority in South Africa, and of setting up an Administration over all South Africa independent of her Majesty's Government, we consider it our duty solemnly to declare that this war was undertaken solely as a defensive measure to safeguard the threatened independence of the South African Republic, and is only continued in order to secure and safeguard the incontestable independence of both Republics as sovereign international States, and to obtain the assurance that those of her Majesty's subjects who have taken part with us in this war shall suffer no harm whatsoever in person or property.

"On these conditions, but on these conditions alone, are we now, as in the past, desirous of seeing peace re-established in South Africa, and of putting an end to the evils now reigning over South Africa; while, if her Majesty's Government is determined to destroy the independence of the Republics, there is nothing left to us and to our people but to persevere to the end in the course already begun, in spite of the overwhelming pre-eminence of the British Empire, confident that that God who lighted the unextinguishable fire of the love of freedom in the hearts of ourselves and of our fathers will not forsake us, but will accomplish His work in us and in our descendants.

"We hesitated to make this declaration earlier to your Excellency, as we feared that as long as the advantage was always on our side, and as long as our forces held defensive positions far in her Majesty's Colonies, such a declaration might hurt the feelings of honour of the British people; but now that the prestige of the British Empire may be considered to be assured by the capture of one of our forces by her Majesty's troops, and that we are thereby forced to evacuate other positions which our forces had occupied, that difficulty is over, and we can no longer hesitate clearly to inform your Government and people in the sight of the whole civilised world why we are fighting, and on what conditions we are ready to restore peace."

If anything could aggravate the irritation produced by the Boer ultimatum of October, this was it. The reader will observe that the document claims as incontestable the status of sovereign international States for both the Republics. And it puts upon the war the complexion of a French duel. Honour is satisfied because each side has drawn blood. "You have defeated us at last, so that, if you grant us all that we ask for, you can no longer be said to grant it because you fear us."

This precious document was the handiwork of Mr. Fischer, the same gentleman who had framed the ultimatum, and it was written rather for the perusal of outsiders

than for the reading of the British Government. In accordance with the practice of what was called at the time the New Diplomacy, the proposal was communicated to the press of the civilised world at the same time as it was telegraphed to Downing Street. Truth to tell, the Boers still buoyed themselves up with the notion that some of the Powers of Europe, or perhaps the United States of America, would interfere on their behalf, either by diplomatic representations or by force of arms. And in this they were encouraged by their envoy in Europe, one Dr. Leyds, who by means not too nice had enlisted the virulent pens of a certain section of the Continental Press, and fondly imagined that he was creating a body of opinion which would force the hands of the Governments of the great Powers.

Lord Salisbury replied promptly and to the point, by refusing categorically the terms of peace proposed in so insolent a fashion by the Presidents. And he made it clear, at the same time, that her Majesty's Government had resolved to unite the territories of the Republics to the dominions of the Crown. As an example of the State Paper written in plain and unambiguous language, Lord Salisbury's despatch is worthy of reproduction :—

"FOREIGN OFFICE, March 11, 1900.

"I have the honour to acknowledge your Honours' telegram, dated March 5, from Bloemfontein, of which the purport is principally to demand that her Majesty's Government shall recognise the 'incontestable independence' of the South African Republic and Orange Free State 'as sovereign international States,' and to offer, on those terms, to bring the war to a conclusion.

"In the beginning of October last, peace existed between her Majesty and the two Republics under the Conventions which then were in existence. A discussion had been proceeding for some months between her Majesty's Government and the South African Republic, of which the object was to obtain redress for certain very serious grievances under which British residents in the South African Republic were suffering. In the course of those negotiations, the South African Republic had, to the knowledge of her Majesty's Government, made considerable armaments, and the latter had, consequently, taken steps to provide corresponding reinforcements to the British garrisons of Cape Town and Natal. No infringement of the rights guaranteed by the Conventions had, up to that point, taken place on the British side. Suddenly, at two days' notice, the South African Republic, after issuing an insulting ultimatum, declared war upon her Majesty; and the Orange Free State, with whom there had not even been any discussion, took a similar step. Her Majesty's dominions were immediately invaded by the two Republics, siege was laid to three towns within the British frontier, a large portion of the two Colonies was overrun, with great destruction to property and life, and the Republics claimed to treat the inhabitants of extensive portions of her Majesty's dominions as if those dominions had been annexed to one or other of them. In anticipation of these operations the South African Republic had been accumulating for many years past military stores on an enormous scale, which, by their character, could only have been intended for use against Great Britain.

"Your Honours make some observations of a negative character upon the object with which these preparations were made. I do not think it necessary to discuss the questions you have raised. But the result of these preparations, carried on with great secrecy, has been that the British Empire has been compelled to confront an invasion which has entailed upon the Empire a costly war and the loss of thousands of precious lives. This great calamity has been the penalty which Great Britain has suffered for having in recent years acquiesced in the existence of the two Republics.

"In view of the use to which the two Republics have put the position which was given to them, and the calamities which their unprovoked attack has inflicted upon her Majesty's dominions, her Majesty's Government can only answer your Honours' telegram by saying that they are not prepared to assent to the independence either of

THE ESSEX REGIMENT STORMING THE DRIEFONTEIN TRENCHES.

the South African Republic or of the Orange Free State."

It was now a fight to a finish. The Boers knew that surrender meant the loss of their independence; and the rest of the world knew that, whatever might have been in the minds of her Majesty's advisers in the summer of 1899, the spring of 1900 found them firmly resolved to see the British flag the supreme and sole symbol of authority between the Zambesi and the Cape.

It was while these negotiations were in progress that the affair of Poplar Grove took place, and the very day upon which the answer of the British Government was despatched from London, Lord Roberts fought another battle on the road to Bloemfontein.

The 8th and 9th of March were days of rest. The affair of Poplar Grove had been practically a move by Lord Roberts to clear his front. Now he prepared to march on Bloemfontein.

A glance at the map will show that the British army was to the north-west of the Free State capital. He intended to march, not directly upon the town but a little to the south of it, so as to strike the railway south and east of Bloemfontein. In other words, he did not intend to attack the western side of the town, where the enemy had some fortifications, and where the ground was best adapted for defence. This would be his nearest point, it is true, but about a day and a half of extra marching would take him round those defences to some country much more open, where the kopjes were fewer and less close.

There were three roads from Poplar Grove to the Free State capital—a distinct advantage to a moving army. For it is well known to military men that the easiest and most expeditious way of carrying an army along is to divide it into three or more columns, advancing on parallel roads towards the same objective. The reason will appear to the reader, if he bears in mind that an army of a hundred thousand men marching along the same road—supposing that road to be as wide as Whitehall—would occupy a space nearly fifty miles long, so that one part of the army would be two forced marches away from another part. The ideal country for marching is a country with plenty of good roads running parallel to one another and connected by cross roads. Three columns of 30,000 men apiece will cover three times as much ground in twenty-four hours as one column of 90,000.

Wherefore Lord Roberts divided his army into three columns. The left column, under General French, comprised the 6th Division of Infantry (Kelly-Kenny's), the 1st Cavalry Brigade, and a large force of mounted infantry under Colonel Alderson. This column was to march along the Modder River road, *viâ* Baberspan, Doornboorn, Venter's Vallei, and Leeuwberg.

The right column was composed of the 7th Infantry Division, the 3rd Cavalry Brigade, and Ridley's mounted infantry. General Tucker, in command of this column, was to lead it along a road which started south and then turned east, *viâ* Petrusburg, Drinkop, Panfontein, Weltevrede, and Venter's Vallei.

Lord Roberts himself went with the centre column, having with him an enormous body of troops. He had the 9th Infantry Division under Colvile, the Guards' Brigade under Pole-Carew, the 2nd Cavalry Brigade, two bodies of mounted infantry under Colonels Martyn and Le Gallais, all the heavy artillery, including the Naval Brigade and the main body of

the transport, together with the 7th Field Company of the Royal Engineers.

Lord Roberts proposed to proceed by a road between the other two, but converging on General French's column at Leeuwberg. His path lay through Driefontein, Asvogel Kop, Venter's Vallei, and thence to Leeuwberg.

The front from French's left flank to Tucker's right flank would vary from fifteen to twenty miles. And the convoy, depleted though it had been by the loss of the £100,000 of transport, contained 500 ox-waggons drawn by about 8,500 oxen. The task before Lord Roberts, as will be seen, was an arduous one. He had to traverse a hundred miles of sandy country, on roads that were only roads in name. For no Macadam had appeared in the Free State to soften the lot of the wayfarer. The convoy had to be drawn over and through sandy plains, rocky hills, dry river beds, and all sorts of splits in the ground.

On the morning of the 10th everything was ready for the advance, and at daybreak the left column set out from its encampment at Waaihoek, in the direction of a place called Abram's Kraal. This place was some six miles up the river, and some of the Colonial scouts of Roberts's Horse had reported on the previous evening that it was held by small bodies of the enemy. French had not been marching very long before he became assured that Abram's Kraal was a point of little importance. The enemy held it in little strength—being, in fact, only placed there as a blind. But there was at Driefontein Farm, about five miles to the south of Abram's Kraal, a strong position held in considerable force.

Now Driefontein was not really in French's line of march, but was properly upon the road marked out for the centre column. Nevertheless the Silent Cavalryman and General Kelly-Kenny, who commanded the infantry of the column, decided to deflect their troops from the route laid down for them and to rout the enemy out of this new position.

So Roberts's Horse and a few other Colonial troops were told to continue on to Abram's Kraal, and there to occupy the attention of the Boers, while the main body of the left column turned south-east at a point about three miles from Waaihoek. The cavalry was considerably in advance of the infantry, and at 10 a.m. came upon a strongly fortified position at Driefontein, held by Commandant De Wet and a force numbering about 4,000 men with artillery. Away went a galloper to Kelly-Kenny, telling him to hurry his men along, for here was something for the infantry to do. Another galloper sped to Lord Roberts with intelligence that immediately in front of him the Boers had again assembled in force, blocking the direct road to the Free State capital. The intelligence was as unexpected to Lord Roberts as it was welcome to the men in his command. For the scouts had seen nothing on the previous day of this body of the enemy, which had doubtless been lying concealed in dongas until De Wet knew that the invaders were on the march.

In the Free State veldt you frequently find dongas big enough to contain a thousand men, dug out, as it were, of the plain, and so completely hidden as to be invisible to anyone a hundred yards away. And it is to be feared that many British officers, when out scouting with their patrols, contented themselves with galloping to the top of a hill and looking round. They might see a plain miles in length stretching before them—a plain containing

no trace of man or horse. The officer would at once conclude that no enemy was near: yet there might be in that plain half a dozen deep dongas, sufficient to hold, and perhaps holding, 5,000 or 6,000 men. This may explain why Lord Roberts was entirely unaware of De Wet's presence in his immediate front. Certain it was that the British field-marshal had not the slightest idea of the enemy's proximity.

At about 10.30 a.m. the cavalry came in touch with the enemy. Porter's brigade was in advance with a horse battery. The Boers allowed the line of patrols to get within range of their artillery, and then opened upon the squadrons with two Creusot guns and a pom-pom. Porter pressed on and detached Major Allonby with a squadron of the Inniskillings and some of the mounted infantry to occupy a kopje on the extreme left of the Boers—a kopje apparently untenanted.

Then the centre came up with two more horse batteries, which, galloping into position, were quickly at work. These two batteries were splendidly handled, and, indeed, quite carried off the artillery honours of the day. They were the T and the U Batteries; and their first business was to shower shrapnel on a ridge containing the Boer sharp-shooters, placed to guard their guns. These sharp-shooters were within range of our batteries, which had to contend, therefore, with both rifle and artillery fire. The Dutch marksmen soon had enough. Shell after shell burst with greatest accuracy just in front of them, and after half an hour of it the Dutchmen retired. U Battery promptly limbered up again and dashed into the plain to shell the retreat. Then ensued a huge duel. The pom-pom opened a fire of great accuracy upon the battery—a fire kept up with the utmost spirit. The retreating riflemen also rallied, and again dropped bullets amongst the gun limbers.

Major Taylor was in command of the guns, and he might well have limbered up again and retired out of the hot corner in which he had placed himself. But no such thought had entered his mind. The gunners loaded and fired as quickly and aimed as accurately as though they had been completely out of range of the enemy's shot and shell. Half a dozen men were hit; but still U Battery pumped shrapnel at the Boers. For a full thirty minutes the duel continued—pom-pom against 12-pounder—and at last, overwhelmed by the fury of the British fire, the Dutchmen withdrew their gun and quitted the ridge.

General French was still under the impression that the Boers were only a small rearguard. He, however, placed his cavalry under cover of one of the kopjes and waited for Kelly-Kenny. Up came that general with his hardy infantry, and was assured that his front had been cleared, and that he might march straight on. So on he went, with the Welsh Regiment and the Buffs leading, and the Yorkshire Regiment and the Essex Regiment following in support.

Kelly-Kenny had taken care to spread his men out with intervals of nine yards between the files; but still, the battalions marched quite openly, not troubling to take cover because they had no idea of meeting with any resistance. As straight as they could go, they marched for the ridge from which the pom-pom had been driven a couple of hours before. It was now about 2 p.m. The Welshmen and the Buffs swung up the slope cheerfully, and had come to within 600 yards of

the top, when suddenly there descended upon them a fire so hot and terrible that, without orders, every man threw himself flat to earth. The fire came not only from the ridge ahead, but also from a ridge on the left—the latter being slightly pushed forward, so as to give its garrison the advantage of a cross fire. The Welshmen did not lie down long. They had no idea of being kept back ; so, after pouring in several volleys, they again began to advance.

There was some cover on the slope, and the Welshmen took advantage of it with great intelligence. They wriggled across open ground, they ensconced themselves behind boulders and fired for a time, and then rushed at top speed a little way, being careful to expose themselves as little as possible to the aim of those terrible marksmen.

The Buffs were feeling the severity of the fire from the left, and for some little time found it impossible to advance. A sergeant, wriggling forward, showed his hand for a moment above the level of the ground. A bullet went clean through the palm. Another man, crawling to better cover, displayed his heel for a single second. A bullet pierced it instantly. But soon the East Kent men were lying down, coolly and steadily returning the fire from the ridge. Then they heard a cheer behind, and a stalwart band of fair-haired men came up the slope at the double, charging straight for the top of the ridge. It was the Essex Regiment, the old 44th. With a steadiness not to be surpassed, the men of the Eastern county charged up the slope, never halting to fire, nor taking any more cover than they might accidentally get as they continued the charge. They were fighting under the eye of Stephenson, their own colonel, who was general of the brigade, and they intended to do him credit.

Between the files of the Buffs they passed, and the "Third" cheered them as they went. The Kentish men devoted themselves to the task of keeping down the Mauser fire from the ridge by steady and persistent volleying. As the Welshmen and the Essex Regiment drew nearer and nearer to the top of the ridge, so hotter and hotter grew the fire that greeted them. Down they went, officer and man. The crest of the ridge grew nearer and nearer. You can see the slouch hats and brown faces of the burghers as they peer round their boulders. You can even see the brown muzzles of their Mausers held against the sides of the stones. For the Boer marksman, shooting from behind a boulder, does not put the muzzle of his rifle over the top of it and look over to take aim : he peers round the side of it, showing only his right shoulder and the right half of his face, and making his rifle invisible by placing it along the stone.

Thickly and yet more thickly the fearless infantry strew the slope of the ridge. Already they have lost nearly 300 men, and there are fifty yards still to cover. Then the word comes, "Fix bayonets!" The Welshmen, fierce and fiery, clash the bit of steel on the rifle-barrel. The men of Essex, with a composure and deliberation even more deadly, quietly whip out the bayonet and fix it for the charge. A bugle blows. Whistles shriek. And in one stride, so it seems to the men themselves, they clear the fifty yards between them and the entrenchments, and fall to the murderous game.

Your Welshman has ever been a terrible fighter with the steel. Even when he fought half wild against the mail-clad

chivalry of the marches, he worked wonders with his long sharp knife. Discipline has done much for him since then; and there is no kind of soldier on the face of the earth who can carry his steel further into the ranks of the enemy than a man of the Principality.

With one mighty heave the two battalions are into the entrenchments. They drive in the bayonet. Here and there a man in tattered garments, with matted hair, clubs his rifle and aims sweeping blows at the invaders of his country. Transvaal Boers are these. They are the men of Colesberg, drawn from their clutch of that town to block the way of the conquering British in their resistless sweep. They die hard, fighting to the last. But still they die. They may not be savages, but they look it.

THE SCOTS GREYS CHARGING UP A KOPJE AT DRIEFONTEIN.

A white flag! There steps forward, from a trench behind the first, a Boer bearing on his upraised rifle the symbol of surrender. Some of the Essex Regiment walk unsuspectingly forward to receive it, when suddenly from behind and around

the flag-bearer a volley is poured in at point-blank range. Many a soldier falls to this act of treachery ; and those unhit shout fiercely and rush upon the miscreants. Their blood is up now, and it will go hard with the scoundrels who have killed men in a fashion that is not war, but murder.

A corporal named Raff plunges his bayonet through the lungs of the ringleader. He is promoted to be a sergeant on the spot. Other British infantry smite and slay with a ferocity and a bloodthirstiness not shown hitherto. Several of the murderers throw down their rifles and pull out pocket-handkerchiefs. But the Essex Regiment has had enough of white flags for that day, and every man of the murderous gang is soon stretched on the ground with a gash in his chest and another in his back.

The Dutchmen now fly. The ridge is ours, and with it many stores and waggons. But the cost has been terrible. Of British troops engaged, 400 officers and men are killed or wounded, of whom about 60 are killed. Many of the bodies are found to be disfigured, plainly showing that the bullets used have been of the explosive kind. And this circumstance, together with the abuse of the white flag, caused Lord Roberts to telegraph a protest to the Presidents of the two Republics, in which he took occasion to tell them that "such breaches of the recognised usages of war and of the Geneva Convention are a disgrace to any civilised Power."

The Presidents of the two Republics denied the truth of the charge made against their troops ; but, seeing that Lord Roberts as well as numbers of others saw plainly the white flag treachery, the denials of two men who were not present can have little weight.

General Broadwood, with his Cavalry Brigade, had been engaged all day in trying to turn the enemy's flank, and had almost succeeded when night fell. The Boers, afraid once more of being surrounded, fled precipitately, though not so precipitately as to prevent them from carrying away their guns. The New South Wales Mounted Infantry saw one Creusot being carried off in a waggon, and made a daring attempt to capture it. They rode right into the retreating commando, and if they had been supported by a strong troop of Lancers, or heavy well-mounted Dragoons, they might well have carried off their trophy. As it was, with only a small troop of them, they were unable to cope with the Boer rear-guard.

The New South Wales Mounted Infantry were not the only Australians to come under fire. Earlier in the day—in the battle, that is ; not in the pursuit—the 1st Australian Horse charged to within 800 yards of the enemy under a heavy fire, and the New South Wales Lancers, who were with Porter's brigade, had to suffer heavy shelling from the pom-pom.

It was also noticeable that when the battle was over and the pursuit began, the only horses fit to follow up the enemy were the horses of the Australian troops.

We left the Colonial Horse early in the morning on their way to Abram's Kraal. Roberts's Horse and the New South Wales Mounted Rifles constituted the column which was to take charge of the Boer right. When they reached the Kraal the Colonials found the enemy in greater strength than he had been believed to be. But the task of our troopers was not to attack and carry Abram's Kraal, but rather to hold the enemy there while French and Kelly-Kenny smashed him at Driefontein.

It was a job for which the Colonials

were specially fitted. They moved up within rifle range and, taking advantage of abundant cover, kept up a strenuous fire of musketry the whole day. They did only slight actual damage, but their practice was good enough to keep the enemy well occupied and prevent him from going to reinforce his centre.

The Dutchmen replied also from abundant cover, and for about ten hours there continued around the Kraal a long-range fight. There was only one man less on the British side, and he, curiously enough, was named Abrams. All day the rifles cracked, and at night, when the Welsh and Essex men had cleared the ridge in front, the Boers evacuated Abram's Kraal and retreated.

The Boer loss was considerable. As usual, they had taken away with them a great number both of dead and wounded, but they were unable to carry with them those whom the steel slew. These amounted to 102; and besides twice that number of wounded, 40 prisoners fell into our hands. What made the victory more pleasing to the force, was that the defeated commando included the crack regular force of the Transvaal—the Johannesburg Police, or Zarps. The Zarps were a very fine body of men, first-rate shots, and of fine physique. Besides this, they were almost the only troops on the Boer side with any pretence to military discipline.

The road to Bloemfontein now began to seem open.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

TO BLOEMFONTEIN.

THE day after the battle at Driefontein, Sunday, the 11th of March, Lord Roberts resumed his march.

The left column had departed from the road assigned to it on the previous day, and was now on the middle road in front of the centre column.

There was some trouble with the wounded, of whom there were a great number, and the supply of two ambulances to a brigade was found to be totally insufficient. Nevertheless, the left and centre columns made excellent progress, and the evening found them at Asvogel's Kop, a distance of sixteen miles from Driefontein. On that day no opposition was met with.

Lord Roberts was now within striking distance of the Free State capital, and the Boers, consisting of those who had been defeated at Poplar Grove and the Colesberg contingent, routed at Driefontein, prepared a position at Barne's Vley to bar the road to the capital. But, as we have explained, the British commander had no notion of attacking a position if it was possible to turn it, and so the next morning French and he made a turn to the south to avoid the obstruction.

At 5 a.m. the army roused itself from the bivouac and marched at great speed on Venter's Vallei, a distance of about fifteen miles from Asvogel's Kop and eighteen miles south-west of Bloemfontein. French, with his mounted troops, soon covered the ground, being at the appointed spot by 10 a.m.

The cavalry dismounted and ate such scanty food as they had, and patrols went out to scour the country round in order to see whether any and what opposition might be expected. At 1.30 p.m. the word was given to mount and ride, and French set out to secure the capital. To put it shortly, the cavalry general had it in charge to isolate the town by holding the railway to the south and cutting the line to the north of it.

To carry out the first of these objects French was directed to press on to a hill called Leeuw Kop, ten miles nearer to Bloemfontein. By seizing this he would command the railway line between the Free State capital and the south—for the railway ran at the foot of the hill, and a couple of guns on its summit would completely command the line.

It was, of course, necessary to be careful in marching in a hostile country so close to the centre of its power and government. Nobody knew but that the Free Staters might be defending the line in force. But although care was demanded, the great essential was speed, and French marched so rapidly that at 3 p.m. Porter's brigade, which led the cavalry that day, was in possession of the kop. Broadwood's brigade followed at some considerable interval. Arrived at Leeuw Kop, French promptly surveyed the country round and decided to take possession also of some hills on the other side of the line. He also sent into the town a demand for

its surrender. This demand was conveyed by a member of the Free State Executive Council, who was seen driving into the town to attend a special meeting. Him a squadron of the Greys seized, and, much against his will, he became General French's messenger.

Great was the consternation in the sleepy capital of the little Dutch Republic when their burgher drove into the market place with the intelligence that a multitude of Englishmen, all mounted—a multitude which no man could number—was perched upon the hills only eight miles south. The Government of the Free State had kept back from the townspeople, as much as possible, the news of Cronje's surrender, the battle of Driefontein, and the victorious march of the British army. Governments usually do this. Therefore, when it was noised abroad that the British had now certainly come up to the walls of the capital, the burghers took alarm. There were hurried rushes to the railway station, and as many as could find places in the crowded carriages trekked north.

Darkness had come on, and French was completing his dispositions for the decisive battle which should decide the fate of Bloemfontein. For nobody thought that the burghers would yield their chief city without one last great effort to defend it.

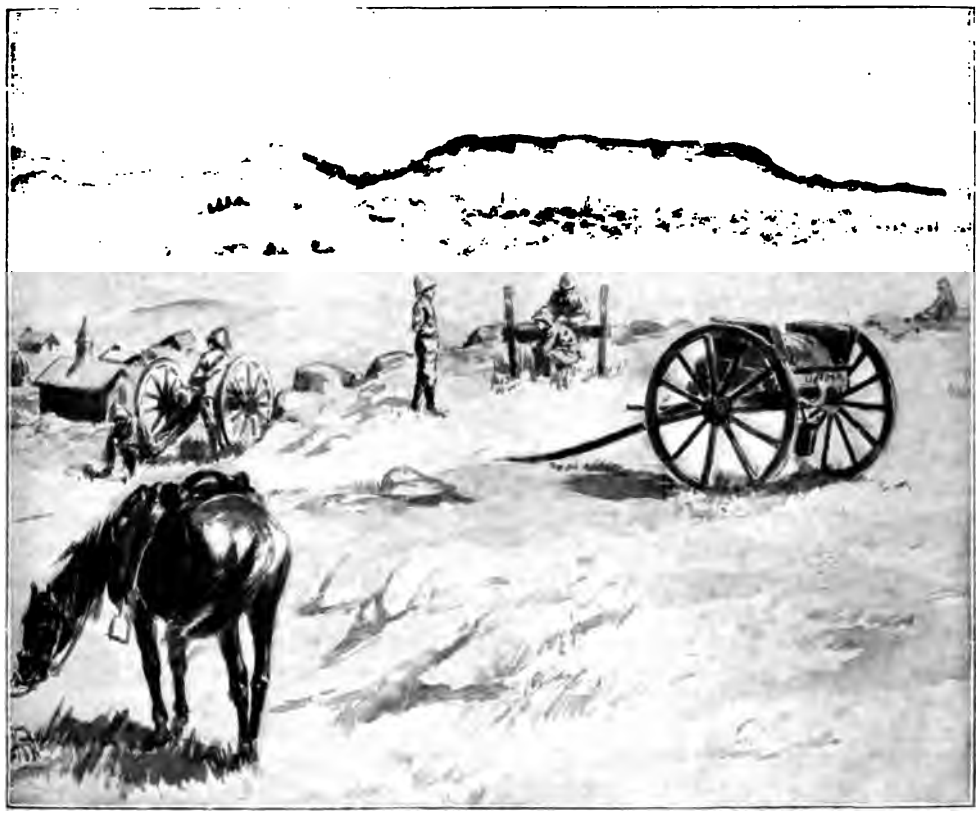
Some of the Colonial scouts had discovered Boers on the left front of Leeuw Kop, holding some hills there with guns. The Silent Cavalryman acted with even more than his usual decision. He pushed on the Inniskillings in the direction of the Boer position, and these troops contrived to seize a bunch of low kopjes within 3,000 yards of the Dutchmen's entrenchments. The Inniskillings pushed forward their advanced patrols between these kopjes, but could not make any headway. They were fired on immediately; and, afraid of falling into some trap in the dim light, they retired to some hills they had seized and waited till daylight.

Further to the east, the Scots Greys rode to see what they could see, and with the help of some mounted infantry, Rimington's Guides, and a horse battery, they took possession of some hills at the eastern end of the Boer position. There was firing for several hours. A long-range duel between the British horse battery and the two Boer guns lasted until 9 p.m. Then the firing ceased, Broadwood's brigade came up, and French's men bivouacked upon the kopjes close by the Boer position.

It was an exciting time for the cavalrymen. They had been marching since the 10th of February, and it was now the 12th of March. They had been first into Kimberley, and now they stood a good chance of being first into Bloemfontein. A fight the next day—a charge or two—a dash at full gallop, and ——! So Greys and Inniskillings, Rimington's Guides and Roberts's Horse picketed their mounts and threw themselves on the ground.

The only people who worked that night upon the kopjes were the horse gunners. There was no sleep for them. French had resolved to make no mistake about this business; so he caused positions to be carefully selected and made the gunners get their batteries all ready to open fire as soon as the day dawned.

While these things were going on, the infantry of the left and centre columns were toiling on from Asvogel Kop to Venter's Vallei. They had marched a long way since they started from Osfontein. Not a soul of them had enjoyed a full meal for over a month. Numbers of them were struggling against the ravages



BLOEMFONTEIN, FROM A HILL WHERE OUR ARTILLERY RESTED TO AWAIT SURRENDER.

of incipient typhoid. But hardly a man fell out. The foot-soldiers, lean and brown and hard, swung along the sandy veldt, making light of distance and fatigue. For was not this the last lap? At Venter's Vallei they bivouacked. There was not much sleep for any man that night, though every soldier of them all was weary enough. Round the camp fires they talked of the morrow. That there would be a battle every one felt quite certain; the only uncertainty seemed to be how many Dutchmen would be captured.

While Roberts and his foot men bivouacked at Venter's Vallei and French and his horsemen on the kopjes south of Bloemfontein, a little band of men was hurrying across the veldt, bent on a daring exploit.

You have heard before of Major Hunter-Weston, of the Royal Engineers, who proved so useful to General French in the campaign in Cape Colony. The major was an officer of consummate courage, extraordinary coolness, and the first ability. He had been deputed to cut off Bloemfontein from communication with the north. To be more correct, he had suggested a plan for accomplishing this end, and had been allowed to undertake it.

Taking with him only ten men, he left French's bivouac at midnight, and, with

his little party, galloped forth into the veldt, steering by compass and making a circuit of Bloemfontein. The best horses in the Cavalry Division had been picked for the use of Hunter-Weston and his little band ; and the men dug in the spur and galloped over the rough ground at a speed almost fatal. For horse after horse stumbled and more than one put its foot into a sand hole. But they scrambled along somehow, and at 3 a.m. reached the line of rails to the north of the town. Throwing themselves from their horses, the men laid violent hands upon the rails, wrenched out some, and started hunting for a culvert. For the major of sappers had resolved to make assurance doubly sure. He had brought some gun-cotton with him, and it was his intention to blow up a culvert therewith. The enemy might be able to hold our men back while they relaid a few rails ; but they would hardly be able to hold them back for the time necessary for repairing a culvert.

Before 4 a.m. a loud explosion startled the veldt. Hunter-Weston had found his culvert, rammed in the gun-cotton, and ignited the fuse. Then the eleven bold Britons jumped on their horses again, and, with rifles carried at the saddle bow, dashed back by the way they had come.

But this time they were not uninterrupted. The noise of the gun-cotton had reached the Boer lines, and, guessing that some British had penetrated to their rear and cut the line of communication, a number of Dutchmen mounted their horses and galloped to cut off the retreat of the party. Hunter-Weston did not give them much time to lay plans for his destruction. He had carefully studied the country by aid of topographical maps, and he made his party take advantage of every rise to cover their movements.

Spur, spur—there is a noise ahead, like the neighing of a horse. That must be a Boer picket. The question is, shall we go round and avoid it ? The other question is, should we not be likely to be cut off or lose our way if we did go round ? The sun begins to cast its first rays low down on the horizon. We must take advantage of the dim light to effect a surprise. If we spread ourselves out, the Dutchmen will hardly know whether we are ten or a hundred until we are on them. A dash in the half-light is what we must try. Anyhow, it does not matter very much whether they kill us or not now. We have done our work. But life is sweet—then spur, spur !

At that ridge of kopjes on the left front. There is a hill lower than the rest and less steep. Keep your distance and charge ! Goading their chargers to highest speed, the eleven spread out, fifteen yards' distance between the files, and ride slap at the low kopje. They are nearly on the top when a voice challenges in Dutch, and a figure rises from the ground with rifle at shoulder. No time to parley with him. The spur is the weapon just now, not the sword. The rifle of the Boer sentry speaks thrice in rapid succession ; but the British horsemen take no more notice of his shooting than they did of his challenge, and with a heave they lift their horses up the hill and start galloping down the opposite slope. The shots of the sentry have roused the picket, and weird forms rise out of the earth, barring the way of Hunter Weston. But it is not easy to shoot accurately before the sun is up. And it is very unlikely that the finest shot in the world will hit a horseman galloping down hill and away from him in such a light. Not a blow is struck nor a shot fired by any of the British.

To halt means to offer a better target to the Mausers.

Hullo, what is that? There is a jingling of accoutrements and a clatter of a rifle falling on stones, as a horse pitches forward and rolls over down the hill. A chance bullet has struck the unfortunate beast. "Look to the rider, some of you"; and a trooper dashes to the spot where a brown heap proclaims the fallen rider of the slain horse. Half stunned, the thrown man rises.

Photo:] [N. P. Edwards, Littlehampton.

MARKET SQUARE, BLOEMFONTEIN.

He is soon behind his comrade, whose horse, carrying the double burden, speeds away gallantly to rejoin the rest of the troop.

The patrol is almost out of shot when another bullet, fired at a venture, wounds a second trooper's horse. But this animal contrives to keep up until he has carried his owner out of range. And the party returns rejoicing to the bivouac on Leeuw Kop, having lost nothing more than a couple of horses, and having, by their daring raid, inflicted heavy loss upon the enemy—a loss which is gain to Lord Roberts, not only because it helps to cripple the foe, but also because it materially assists him. Indeed, if it had not been for Hunter-Weston's exploit, it is hard to say to what plight the army of invasion might have been put in the near future. For the blowing up of the culvert rendered it impossible for the Free Staters to carry away twenty-eight locomotives, 250 carriages and trucks, and a large quantity of coal. It also—but that is a small matter—prevented a strong reinforcement from the Transvaal from reaching Bloemfontein.

We say that the cutting off of the reinforcement was a small matter as compared with the capture of railway rolling stock, because, although Lord Roberts was now in possession of the line from his base of supply, he had not enough trucks and engines to work the railway without those that were captured.

The reader will remember that at the outbreak of the war, or, rather, when war had been decided upon but had not actually commenced, the Free State Government had accumulated on the north side of the Orange River the greater part of the rolling stock belonging to the line running to Cape Colony. Wherefore the

major of the sappers had accomplished a performance which was more than brilliant—it was useful. In some armies a service of this kind, combining brilliant performance and useful result, would have met with instant reward. But in this case Hunter-Weston remained a major, and as Major Hunter-Weston he served for many a month afterwards, and contrived to render the army many another important service.

At about 4.30 General French's squadrons were shelled by the Boer guns. Two of the horse batteries which had been placed in position during the night, easily commanded the Boer artillery, but for some reason or other did not reply to its fire. Half-past five o'clock saw Field-Marshal Lord Roberts on his pony marching out of Venter's Vallei with his infantry. He followed hard on the heels of French, intending to support that general's cavalry with his riflemen, for the last battle for the possession of Bloemfontein could not be left to chance—it must be a decisive blow.

On the night of the 12th, when French seized the hills commanding Bloemfontein, there was a panic in the capital of the Free State. President Steyn did his best to organise resistance to the invader, but the more military men of the burgher forces declined to commit themselves to the defence of the town. In this, no doubt, they acted wisely, for if they had remained to defend Bloemfontein, they would have been inevitably surrounded, and as inevitably killed or captured. Clearly their best chance of success was to leave the capital to take care of itself and to make for the open country, which alone offered them the slightest chance. The one hope of the burghers now was to prevent the British from surrounding them as they had surrounded Cronje. And so the fighting Boers declined altogether to defend President Steyn's seat of government. On the night of the 12th of March scores of them trekked north, and at last Steyn himself recognised that he had no chance whatever of making a successful resistance there. He fled, therefore, he and Messrs. Reitz and Fischer, his two most prominent officers of state, together with most of the chief officials to Kroonstad, first issuing a proclamation that to Kroonstad the seat of government had been transferred.

The Government having abandoned Bloemfontein, the populace could do no more or less than surrender. Next day at 11 a.m. the Mayor of Bloemfontein arrived in the mounted infantry camp, saying that the townspeople intended to surrender, but the mayor did not seem to have authority himself to offer that surrender. In a short time a trap drove up containing the landdröst and Mr. Fraser, a member of the Free State Parliament and leader of the Opposition there. It was he who had led such opposition as there was to President Steyn's war policy in the autumn. Like most people who venture to oppose the making of war when war happens to be popular, Fraser had been accused of want of patriotism and all sorts of moral crimes. To him, now, the people of Bloemfontein had turned, asking him to go out to meet the conqueror and make such terms as he could.

Just before noon these three notables had made a formal surrender of the town, delivering the keys formally to Lord Roberts. The surrender was unconditional, for the British commander would accept none other, and at once the British prepared to enter the captured town.

At one o'clock the people of Bloemfontein, or such of them as were left,

turned out to see the most wonderful sight they had ever beheld. What they did, in fact, see was, first of all, a little broad-shouldered old man, riding a light grey horse. He wore no decoration of any kind, being dressed in a simple brown suit and wearing an ordinary helmet. After him came something a little more picturesque—the aides-de-camp and other members of the Staff, dressed in the most gorgeous uniforms they could lay their hands on at the time. Then came the body of fifty men who were general officers on the Staff, with their staffs, and afterwards the foreign attachés, whom the curious custom of courtesies between nations permitted to accompany our army to observe its weaknesses and pry out its strength.

Thus the greatest British general rode into the enemy's capital. Men and women —more women than men—turned out to gaze upon the man whose fame they had heard of, whose prowess they had felt. And the women, many of them ignorant, their heads stuffed with horrible stories of "English barbarities," and dreading plunder and massacre and the nameless horrors of an army let loose upon a conquered city, sighed in relief. For, with the instinct of the sex, they saw that this was no stern soldier such as they had heard of —this was a man of kindly heart.

And more than one turned to her neighbour with the words, "How sad he looks!" Sad? The victorious general sad in his hour of triumph?

Yes! He was, in very truth, the saddest man in all the Free State. For when he gazed ahead he saw not the town he had conquered, not the people he had subdued. He saw a bright young face—a face dear to him. And he heard not the sounds of the plaudits of the sycophantic crowd of townsfolk, or the cheering of the lean brown men who rode behind. He only heard a voice saying, "Father."

Yet he knew he should never see that face again, nor hear that voice on earth. There was that fresh grave in Natal. Nor could all the shouts of triumph nor all the honours of a conqueror bring joy to the kindly heart of Frederick, Lord Roberts. For they could not give him back his son.

But if the general was still sad, there was jubilation in the ranks of the British troops at the very thought of annexing the "capital." If Tommy Atkins had dreamt of a South African London, he was woefully disappointed. There was not even a decent road to it—nothing but a cart track winding over the veldt, in and out like some of the roads in Derbyshire, made to avoid the hills whenever possible. A small town, with a normal population of about 3,500 people—only about a fourth of them being Boers—and with hardly any buildings of architectural pretensions, Bloemfontein was voted by the rank and file a "blooming fraud."

It was not big enough to accommodate a British brigade, and all its shops were unable to provide a day's rations.

But the little town represented one of England's foes—a cowed foe, a foe that had surrendered—and it was fitting that the British flag should fly over it.

And, therefore, Lord Roberts marched towards it at the head of a little procession —consisting of his aides-de-camp and staff and foreign attachés, with some newspaper correspondents and Indian servants, followed by cavalry and guns, the whole line being about a mile in length.

Without undue haste the victors entered the town, passing through the market-place on the way to the Presidency.

Lord Roberts has scarcely crossed into the town when he calls a halt. His quick eye has caught sight of some natives looting. The offenders are brought before him and sternly rebuked, and ordered to restore the property they have thus commandeered.

Then on, through lines of residents, who cheer him. The cheers are of mingled character There are the cheers of the sturdy Briton who has consistently refused to aid or abet the foes of his country ; there are the cheers of the Boer remnant, glad that so far as they are concerned the struggle is over ; and there are the cheers of men of British nationality who have been active on veldt and kopje in sniping their fellow countrymen. But there was cheering on every hand—with but one discordant note raised by a Transvaaler, who attempted to embody his feelings in a groan. He soon had something substantial to groan for, in the shape of vigorous blows administered by his countrymen and neighbours.

A short halt was called in the market-place, where at the front of the Government buildings and under the shadow of the statue of Sir J. H. Brand, Lord Roberts in a few words proclaimed the fact that Bloemfontein was now occupied in the name of Victoria, Queen of Great Britain and Empress of India.

Then the procession re-formed and proceeded to the Presidency. Lord Roberts entered the market-place, while the crowd sang "God Save the Queen."

Then for a moment there was a hush. All interest centred on a bare flagstaff, where the flag of the Orange Free State had been wont to fly.

It was now bare save for the halyards. But in a couple of minutes the ropes began to move, and soon the Union Jack fluttered in the breeze—to be exact, at 1.40 p.m.

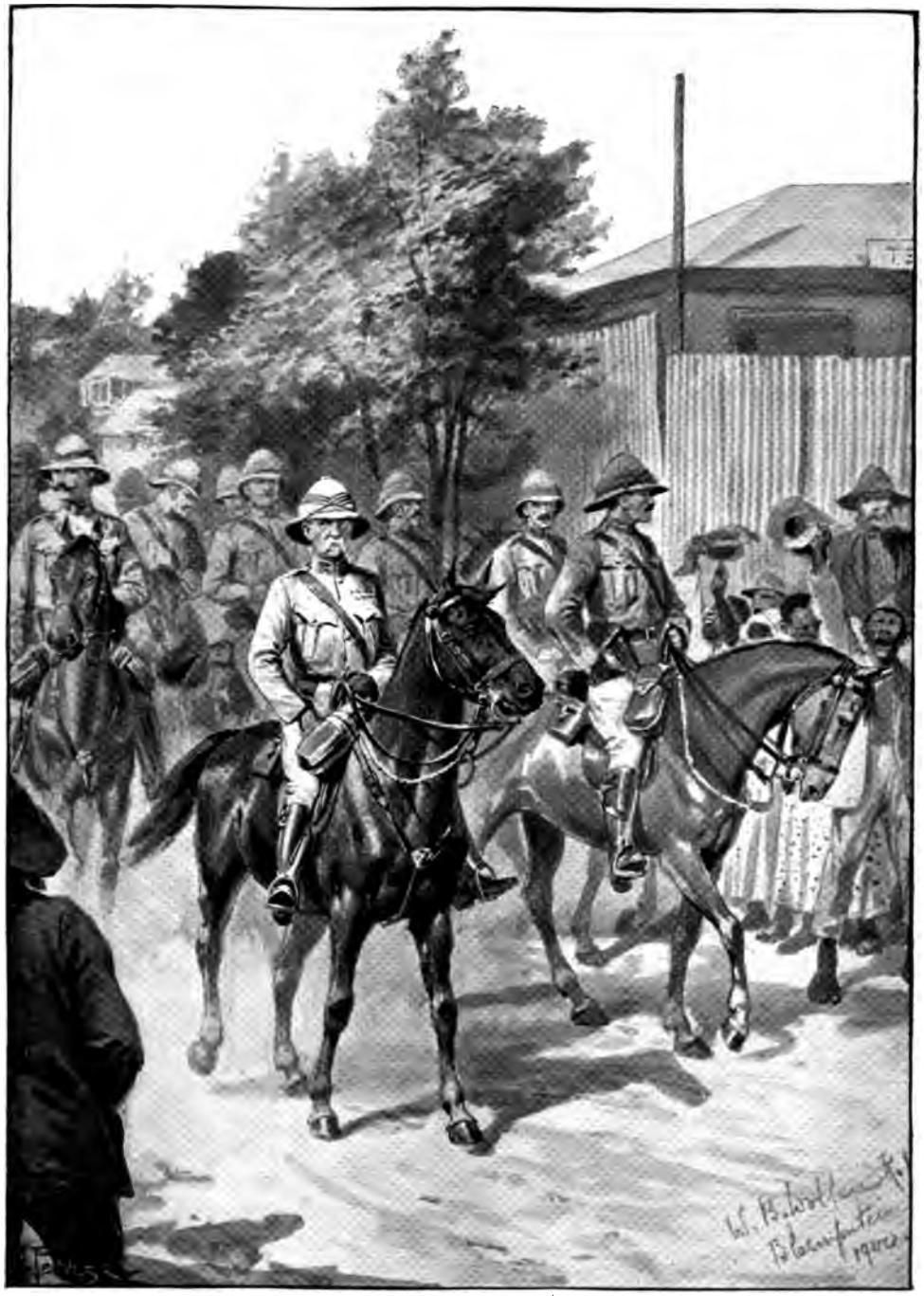
There is a history about that flag, which bore in one corner a counterfeit of the little green shamrock. The flag had been worked by Lady Roberts—wife of one V.C. and mother of another V.C.—and carried out to South Africa for the express purpose of being hoisted at that particular spot.

Ere the flag was fully in view a mighty shout arose. Every hat was raised. "God Save the Queen!" Hurrah for the old flag!

The march past was historic. In the ranks were the men who had borne the burden and heat of the day—and borne themselves as worthy sons of their sires. Among the onlookers were soldiers who had served the Queen in the Crimea and in the Mutiny, and sailors who had sailed beneath the flag on every sea. But none had borne themselves more bravely on the march and in the combat—none had endured more cheerfully the hardships inseparable from such a campaign—none had struck harder blows when the fight was on—none had been more willing to help a fallen foe when "Cease fire" had sounded, than the stalwart lads now marching past Lord Roberts.

"Scotland for ever!" shouted the Scots Guards again and again as they saluted the flag. And the gallant Coldstreams—the adored of London nursemaids, though minus the dainty polish and the dandy manner which makes them subjects for such adoration—and the plucky artillerymen and the mounted infants, were equally well received.

To say that their mothers would not have known them is well within the truth. They were khaki, indeed, from head to heel—it would scarcely be safe to



"FIRST OF ALL, A LITTLE BROAD-SHOULDERED OLD MAN" (p. 803).

say from cap to boot, since this would imply that they were *clothed*, a statement which could hardly be maintained. There was just a sufficiency of remnants about some of them to come up to the Irishman's garment which was a lot of holes fastened together, but suits of clothes were few and far between. They looked like a "ragged regiment"—yet they were worthy their veteran leader, and worthy to salute the flag under which he stood on that 13th day of March, 1900.

Lean were they, for quarter rations had been their lot for many days. The dust of the veldt was on them. Bearded, too, was every mother's son. They looked as tough as whipcord, as fine as the spring of a watch. The horses that the cavalry bestrode, the beasts dragging the guns, showed every rib.

There go the sailormen, with their monster guns, swinging along as though they had just come ashore for a day's frolic. Even the Dutch women, bitterest of all their foes, could not forbear to cheer. Behold, too, a small, compact regiment where every man is a giant—the Canadians, these: the men who shattered Zwart Piet Cronje.

Past the saluting point, company by company, battery by battery, squadron by squadron, horse, foot, and artillery, the navy, the army, and the reserve forces, they file in majestic array. No holiday review, this. It is the triumphal progress of a conquering army.

And of all the men who turned "Eyes right!" to whom the field-marshal accorded a gracious salute and a smile of welcome, none felt the honour more, none deserved it better, than the City Imperial Volunteers. They were veterans now. They had been in the firing line. They had seen the storming of a fortified town, and the capture of a general and his army Their coming had indeed coincided, as Lord Roberts had prophesied that it should, with the turn in the tide of war.

One last shout as the last man passes the saluting point, the field-marshal brings his hand to his cap once more, and the ceremonies of the day are over. The honours were with the Guards, who between three o'clock on Monday afternoon and one o'clock on Tuesday afternoon had marched thirty-eight miles. And their leader promised them that, for their willing work, he would himself lead them into Pretoria.

Bloemfontein was occupied. There was little outward show, save for the marching through of detachments of the soldiers, and the playing of British patriotic airs. There was a day's holiday, and then shops and stores were opened; private trade and municipal life went on as usual. There was no interregnum, in which law and order ceased to operate. The silk flag with the Union Jack and the shamrock embroidered thereon, was a pledge of fair play all round, of equality before the law, of an "open door" for trade.

The citizens slept in peace. And the main body of the troops marched through the city and bivouacked on the open veldt.

Next day the 6th Division, having marched by their appointed route through Petrusburg and the southern road, entered Bloemfontein and got a hearty welcome, in which the Scottish residents took a prominent part. They had missed the fighting, but had covered twenty-five miles more ground than the rest of the army.

To all appearances the army was composed of dirty tatterdemalions: for the

dust had been more plentiful than soap and water, and there had been no outfitters' stores on the route and no time to spend on the luxury of mended garments —no time, even, to have "boots repaired while you wait." But the faces, though black, were comely—the smile of victory was on them all, and the tread was light and springy. And as the bugles sounded their joyous notes (though they were as much out of shape as if fresh from a faction fight, after trying to play "Boyne Water"), the onlookers cheered, and Tommy Atkins cheered back again.

On Tuesday the flag was hoisted. On Wednesday the troops rested; and having been well fed, both man and beast (for the millers and farmers of the Free State were ready to produce their stores from the surrounding district when they realised that John Bull paid ready money), they were ready for the next move.

On Thursday a contingent of Scots Guards and Grenadiers and Royal Artillery and mounted infantry moved onward to restore communication with the Cape by way of the line of rail running to Cape Town.

They were quite ready to participate in the honours of the entry into Pretoria—they were quite sure they would so participate. For they knew that Lord "Bobs" said what he meant, and meant what he said.

And a certain soldier of the Grenadiers said to a mate of his: "Wot did I bloomin' well sye? This 'ere is Bloomin' fountain, ain't it? Where's Kroojer, I wonder?" "Don't worry your stoopid 'ead about Kroojer," quoth his mate; "the Little Man 'll 'ave 'im by the 'eels afore 'e's much older."

CHAPTER LXIX.

THE OTHER END OF THE LINE—CLEMENTS AND GATACRE'S OPERATIONS.

AFTER General Clements had retired on Arundel the enemy gave him plenty to do for several days. On February 20th they made a determined attempt to get round and cut Clements off from his base. They brought up a big Creusot gun and a pom-pom to attack the mounted infantry, and, establishing themselves on Taaibosch Hill, vigorously shelled the British pickets for some little time. Fortunately Clements had a 5-in. gun in position, and this returned the Boer fire with such effect as to silence both the guns on Taaibosch Hill by four well-aimed shells.

At about eight a.m. a patrol reported that a body of about 200 strong was attempting to get round on the Naauwpoort road—a very dangerous move for Clements. For he had not so many mounted troops as General French had when the Boers made a similar attempt before. But it was imperative that somebody should go out and intercept the flanking force, so as to prevent communications being cut.

Clements selected a small force, about 200 all told, of Australians. There was a squadron from New South Wales under Captain Legge, one of Victoria Mounted Rifles under Captain McCleish, and one of South Australians under Captain Howland. With them went two 15-pounder field guns. On the other side the Western Australians went out to guard the other flank.

Legge and his men had not gone very far before they came in touch with the enemy, and soon a skirmish began, a skirmish that lasted all day. The *modus operandi* of the Australians was, for the whole 200 to advance under cover of fire from the field guns, attacking in very much the same fashion as the Boers themselves were accustomed to attack. Spreading out as wide as they could, in no particular formation, except formation for taking advantage of ant-heaps, the Colonials crept and crawled from one cover to the next, every man firing when Providence vouchsafed him the opportunity of doing so without exposing himself.

This was a method of fighting that the Boers were not accustomed to on the part of the enemy. Hitherto the British had thrown away all advantage of numbers by persistently attacking in Aldershot fashion the most impossible positions—positions that a hundred could easily hold against a thousand. But this kind of Englishman was a new development. The Free Staters and rebel Cape Dutch of the Colesberg commando could not understand the game at all. Here were Englishmen who, instead of standing up like fools to be shot, actually preferred to take cover skilfully and to shoot their enemies!

The Dutchmen found it extremely annoying. For about ten hours the fighting on the British left raged. The Australians were shooting all day—not, it is true, expending the same amount of ammunition as would have been expended

by a regiment of regular soldiers, but doing quite as much damage and causing considerably more consternation. Not a Boer could show the tip of an elbow without drawing upon it the ready bullet of some watchful Australian. And the worst of it was, these new Englishmen kept drawing nearer and nearer without giving anybody a chance to hit them. When first found, the burghers were in possession of three kopjes, and against these three the British Colonials advanced in the style we have described.

Photo: Fradelle & Young, Regent St., W.
MAJOR-GEN. CLEMENTS.

Soon they were near the top, and it could not be long before they would be on top of the Boers. The two field guns, also advancing from position to position, whence they could more easily pitch their shrapnel over the boulders, were working at such speed that both guns were hot. A voice shouted "Prepare to charge!" It came from behind a boulder not more than 150 yards from the top of one of the kopjes; and so uncomfortably near did it sound that the Boers on that kopje promptly fell back. Their friends on the other two were not long in following them. And, pursued by the never-failing volleys of the Australians, the burghers galloped back as hard as they could go to another cluster of kopjes nearly a mile in the rear.

The Australians were not long in setting out after them. The two field guns limbered up once more and set out also.

The Australians showed as much wiliness as courage. No one who knew them, or had seen how they bore themselves in the fray, could ever imagine them to be afraid of anything on earth. But they were not going to press hot foot after a retreating commando of Boers. Ambushes came naturally to these Dutchmen; and there was neither sense nor reason in charging gaily after a retreating foe only to be drawn into an ambush and cut to pieces.

Wherefore the Australians spread out over the country and advanced warily, with rifles unslung and magazines charged. And in this way they swept the ground in front of them as clear and clean of Boers as a good housemaid sweeps a carpet clean of dust. Here and there a Boer was found lying hidden in a cleft in the ground, as completely concealed as a bird conceals itself at nesting time. But he had to be a Boer of uncommon slimness to escape the observation of the keen-eyed boys of the Colonial Continent. From rock to rock, from donga to donga, from kopje to kopje, the Australians drove the burghers, keeping on their heels all day with the tenacity of terriers. The flanking movement was foiled, the Dutchmen were discomfited, and the blood on the rocks showed that they had not escaped without loss.

At last the Boer commandant gave up his attempt to get round to the Naauwpoort road in that direction. He called off his forces at about 6 p.m., and retreated at full speed on his laager. As for the little force which had so effectually foiled the

burghers, it had lost only one man killed and one wounded.

Meanwhile, on the east of Arundel, the Western Australians, under Captain Moor, had been engaged in work even warmer than that of their comrades. They were attacked in considerable force, and found themselves under the fire of the pom-pom gun. Here, again, the Dutch commandant was trying to extend his line, and carry it round Clements's camp. The West Australians were considerably in the way of such a movement, and the Boers attacked them in considerable force.

Captain Moor spread out his men very skilfully in such a fashion as to take all the advantage which might be taken from the hilly nature of the country. In point of fact, not a single shell or bullet was effective, so completely had the Colonials learnt the value of cover and how to take advantage of it.

There was a picket sent to do outpost duty amongst a cluster of hills lying away from the main British position and well out to the east. This picket numbered fourteen men. It had not long been posted when one of the men on the look-out reported a large body of horsemen to be approaching from the north-east. The sergeant in charge of the picket took a look at the approaching troops, and at first thought they could not be Boers, for the simple reason that they were marching in close formation, and not in the loose order usually adopted by the canny Dutchmen. But closer inspection proved that the horsemen were men of the Boer army. Probably they were some of the foreigners who had come to Africa to fight against the British. The orthodox way of dealing with such a situation was for the sergeant of the picket to start firing as soon as the enemy came within range, and to send back to the main body for help, or else to fall back and give the alarm. But this particular sergeant seems to have thought more of giving the enemy an alarm than of troubling his friends. His orders were concise and clear. "Don't show a feather. Every man charge his magazine. And when they reach that big rock over there"—this rock was about 300 yards on the right front—"I will give the word 'Fire,' and then give 'em 'magazine' till further orders."

The picket was soon comfortably lying down, every man behind a covering rock, with ten bullets in his magazine, and his eye fixed on the big stone in front. The commando rode on confidently, and apparently without any suspicion of the neighbourhood of an enemy. Nearer and nearer they drew to the big stone. The sergeant of the picket, in his excitement, forgot to say "Fire." What he did say was, "Give 'em hell, boys!" But the men knew what he meant. Rifles rang out with one report.

Seven wiry ponies were riderless on the instant. And as quickly as might be the whole commando wheeled round and rode back by the way they had come. It was clear they had not the slightest idea of the smallness of the force opposed to them; for 300 Boers were not accustomed to run away from a baker's dozen of enemies.

The Australians were not idle. They emptied cartridge after cartridge as they poured volley after volley into the retreating mass—a mass now becoming less and less concentrated as the horsemen abandoned their close formation and spread out as they galloped, so as to present a smaller target to those deadly rifles above.

So much for that flanking attack.

But although the Dutchmen were defeated in their attempt to get round

our right flank by the most unmilitary behaviour of the West Australian picket, the fighting on the right was not over by any means. Captain Moor and his men were hard at it from dawn till dusk. Unlike those Australians on the left flank, these West Australians were defending. The enemy pressed on them in much the same way that the others were pressing near the Naauwpoort road. That is, the Boers pressed on from one piece of cover to the next, making themselves as invisible a s possible, and striving to reach some point near to the British whence they could pour in a rifle fire from cover at close quarters. A few of them managed to get close up ; and if the Australians had been one whit less firm, disaster might well have befallen the camp at Arundel.

But the West Australians stood as firm as rocks ; and although they were hard pressed for many hours by a superior enemy, they never yielded a foot of ground.

The Dutch general, while he was attempting his flanking movements on east and west, made also a feint attack on the British left. At one time it looked as though the Boers were really attacking the posts held by the British pickets all along the line, and particularly to the westward the firing became very hot. The hills occupied by the pickets to the north of Arundel formed a kind of outer line of defence, which Clements could ill afford to lose. Therefore, instead of retiring his pickets when they were attacked, he sent to support them the Worcestershire Regiment and a squadron of the Inniskilling Dragoons. On the approach of these the enemy retired, but continued all day to hang about in a threatening manner.

For several days skirmishing went on round about Arundel. On the 23rd of February the enemy moved to the west of that town, to a place called Kuilfontein Farm, having their entrenchments on a number of kopjes round that farm, and also a strong force with a big gun at Vaal Kop, a big hill about two miles from Kuilfontein. Clements determined to attack, and on the 23rd subjected these places to a heavy artillery bombardment. During the whole of the 24th the bombardment was continued, and at dawn on the 25th Clements delivered his attack.

His force consisted of the Inniskilling Dragoons, the Australians, Prince Alfred's Guard, some mounted infantry, and two field batteries. A 5-in. gun and a howitzer battery had also been brought into position, and were ready to add their lyddite to the shrapnel of the field guns. The Australians and the Inniskillings were sent to attack the enemy's flank, while Prince Alfred's Guard were ordered to ride past Vaal Kop to cut off the Boers' retreat. The lyddite and shrapnel searched Vaal Kop for an hour or two, the shells being careful and slow and the fuses acting to admiration. So accurate was the fire that after a time a field glass was able to discern that the Boers on the top of the hill had had enough of it. The British gunners were joyful, and everybody congratulated everybody else at the Boers having been compelled to evacuate Vaal Kop. Prince Alfred's Guard, having got into the plain beyond that hill, came under fire from the Boer gun. Immediately they were ordered to retire, and as they believed Vaal Kop to be unoccupied they passed right close to the foot of it in the greatest security.

Suddenly a hail of bullets spattered into them. "Gallop, men, this is another of those cursed tricks." For Vaal Kop was not evacuated at all. On the top of it,

artfully concealed from the field glasses of the British officers, were sharpshooters with Martini rifles, firing heavy bullets. They had calculated that the British force would imagine the hill to be untenanted, and would probably place themselves unsuspectingly within reach of a volley. Thanks to their horsemanship, the Colonial Volunteers were soon out of reach, having had a lucky escape, and for half an hour lyddite was hurled at the hill.

At about noon our gunners were surprised to find shells dropping round the limbers of their guns. The cavalry exposed on the plain also found shells dropping amongst the hoofs of their horses. The Boers, with shrewd daring, had brought back cannon to the top of Vaal Kop and opened fire upon our exposed artillery and cavalry.

News had begun to arrive from the Free State—news eminently disquieting to the Boer commandants and their followers. Indeed, the burghers themselves, had they known half the truth, would probably have disbanded and sought every man his farm. The news was of the relief of Kimberley, of the invasion of the Free State by an enormous army, of the shutting up of Cronje in the bed of the Modder.

Under these circumstances, the Boer general who now began to see that he had been outwitted, decided to abandon all hope of penetrating further into the Colony, and to retire into his own country to resist the invader. Wherefore, leaving the merest rear-guard to face Clements, he retired up the railway line to the Orange River, and thence cut across country until he stood across Lord Roberts's path at Driefontein, with the result already told.

Clements was soon on his heels. The English general could not, of course, venture to attack an enemy so vastly superior in numbers, but he could hang upon his rear and prevent him from damaging the railway line irreparably. That Clements should do so was part of Lord Roberts's plan. On the 26th the Dutchmen evacuated their position on the west of Arundel and retired through Rensberg and Colesberg. On the 27th Clements marched into Rensberg again. On the 28th he pushed a force on to Colesberg, where he secured a certain amount of ammunition and arrested several rebels. The re-occupation of the towns was almost without incident. The small Boer rear-guard ran away from Rensberg at the threatened charge of a squadron of the Inniskillings. Little damage had been done to either railway or telegraph, or any buildings in either town. Indeed, the Boers seemed unusually friendly here, for one of them, of a humorous turn of mind, had posted up on a wall the message, "Kind regards to Tommy Atkins."

Clements immediately began to reconnoitre up the river, and threw every man he could into the work of repairing the line towards Norval's Pont. It was quite evident that the Boers had made up their minds to stay for a long time, and that it was only the startling news from the Free State which had made them bolt back over the Orange in the way they had done. They had left behind them half-finished fortifications, elaborate trenches with barbed wire entanglements miles in length in front of them. It was quite evident that they feared a night attack, for their entanglements were constructed specially with a view to tripping up horse and man.

On the 2nd of March a train was running up the line as far as Colesberg Junction. On the 3rd of March 200

Victorians and Tasmanians reconnoitred as far as Wagon Bridge on the Orange River, and found it still intact. A few shells served to disperse a Boer patrol. And, from the way the enemy fled on hearing the bark of the British guns, it was evident they were not the men they had been. On the 4th the Australians and the Berkshire Regiment shifted their camp up to a point seven miles north of Colesberg. On the 5th the enemy was again encountered in a small way by some of the Inniskillings and the Victorians.

A mixed patrol of these regiments patrolling towards Norval's Pont discovered the enemy's pickets, and, after a long-range rifle and carbine duel, the Boers bolted towards their laager. The Victorians were showing the heavy cavalrymen how to move about the country without making themselves unduly conspicuous, and on this occasion the patrol actually came up to within carbine shot of the enemy before the burghers knew anything about their existence.

On the 4th of March General Clements had the line working as far as Achtertang Station, half-way between Colesberg and Norval's Pont, which was the point where the line crossed the Orange into the Free State. A day later he had fully repaired the line between Rensberg and Colesberg, so that traffic was fully restored by the direct route between Cape Town and Achtertang.

BETHULIE RAILWAY BRIDGE, DESTROYED BY THE BOERS.

With Gatacre at Stormberg and Clements at Colesberg, the British were now pushing up towards Bloemfontein, the one on the Cape Town line and the other on the East London line. By a cross-country railway between Stormberg and Rosmead Junction, the two generals were themselves in communication, and could, if necessary, join forces or send reinforcements one to the

other. But their orders were not to join at this point, but each to push on along his own line of railway, Clements to cross by Norval's Pont, and Gatacre by way of Bethulie, when they would be not more than a day's march from Springfontein, where the two lines join.

Brabant's Colonial division was operating on Gatacre's right, somewhat wide of the railway line, and so pushing north by way of Ladygrey, Herschell, Rouxville, and Wepener, with intent to sweep the Free State from the Basutoland border up to Bloemfontein.

In pursuance of the plan of campaign Clements moved on from Colesberg to Norval's Pont on the south side of the Orange on the 8th of March, but he found that the enemy had, two days before, completely wrecked the fine railway bridge by means of dynamite. The Australians were the first to cross the river, where the enemy was reported to be in some strength. The first half-dozen scouts who swam their horses over the stream started immediately to throw up a shelter trench. As they laboured with the spade and heaped up a breast-work of stones, a bearded man walked up to them with the remark: "That's all wrong; you have got the earth and stones on the wrong side." The Australians dropped their spades and unslung their rifles. The Boer—for it was a Boer—saw what a mistake he had made, and promptly jumped into the river. The Australians let him have a few shots, two of which hit him in the leg, and then he was fished out of the river and taken to the field hospital. The Australians then completed their little trench and waited events.

The blowing up of the bridge at Norval's Pont had been entrusted to some Hollanders, and they had done their work thoroughly. So thoroughly, in fact, that Clements's engineers, after careful inspection, pronounced that it would take several weeks to render it safe for traffic. There was nothing for it but to cross by the drift adjacent. A few men waded and swam over, and established pickets upon the other side, but for several days the main body of Clements's army remained on the south side of the Orange. They were waiting for Gatacre to reach the river along the other line.

Gatacre, immediately he had occupied Stormberg on the 5th of March, concentrated his troops which had been spread out in a wide line of outposts for miles across the country. He had posts at Penhoek, Bushman's Hoek, and Cyphergat, and these he concentrated at Stormberg. He also took back from General Brabant two companies of the 1st Royal Scots, which he had lent to that general. Before long Gatacre was on the move. His armoured train scouted north to see whether the line had been seriously damaged, and, as they found it to be comparatively safe up to Burghersdorp on the 7th of March, Gatacre moved on to that place. Burghersdorp was an exceedingly Dutch town, a hotbed of the Africander Bond. It had been the first place in the Colony to raise a commando of rebels to fight for the invaders. By road and rail, infantry, cavalry, and transport accomplished the journey from Stormberg to the rebel town in about ten hours.

The British part of the population welcomed the British troops almost hysterically. They had experienced a most unhappy time since November. Taunts of all sorts had greeted them from their Dutch neighbours, especially after Stormberg and Magersfontein. Now it was their turn, and they waved Union Jacks and

sang "God Save the Queen," with the pleasant feeling that now they were getting their own back.

On the 12th of March the Headquarters' Staff, which had remained at Molteno, moved on to Burghersdorp, and on the same day a column set out for Bethulie Bridge. Some of Gatacre's scouts had already been on ahead, and had found that four spans of the railway bridge had been destroyed and the fifth damaged. But there was a waggon bridge close at hand, still intact, though it had been mined, dynamite placed in position, and a wire laid into the Free State. To save this bridge became the immediate object of Gatacre.

The scouts, Cape Police, mounted infantry, 79th Field Battery, and the 1st Derbyshire Regiment (Sherwood Foresters) were pushed on ahead by train, and they just arrived in time. The enemy had not abandoned the ground, but had established themselves over on the north bank, and had thrown up entrenchments, so as to cover the waggon bridge.

The scouts, Cape Police, and mounted infantry were the first to arrive on the scene at an early hour on the 13th. The Boers were breakfasting at the time. They had completed their operation of mining the bridge with the exception of connecting the charges and the electric wire. The scouts, police, and mounted infantry promptly took possession of a farm at the south end of the bridge, loaded their rifles, and waited, like Mr. Micawber, for something to turn up. Something did turn up, at about 7 a.m., in the form of a number of Boers, who marched, or rather lounged slowly down towards the bridge, to finish their job. The men in the farmhouse marked a man apiece and fired. This was the first intimation the Boers received of the presence of the British. But they were not dispirited; they, too, opened fire promptly and with such effect that in a few minutes one of the Cape Police was stretched on the ground with a bullet through his brain, and another man of the mounted infantry was badly wounded.

But when it came to a sniping duel the scouts and the Cape Police could hold their own with any Boer or rebel of them all, and they made the north end of the bridge so particularly hot that the Boers declined to face their rifles. So far, so good. If the Boers could be kept off the bridge, the wire could not be connected and the bridge was saved. But a suspicion, an uncomfortable suspicion, crossed the minds of the British that as soon as it became dusk some Dutchman would steal along the bridge and connect the wire with the explosive. Then up came two companies of the Sherwood Foresters under Major Shaw, to whom the situation was explained.

All day the foemen faced each other from opposite ends of the precious bridge, the Dutchmen waiting for dusk in order to destroy the structure, and the British also waiting for dusk to see whether there was any virtue in a plan that had been propounded by Lieutenant Popham, of the Derbyshires.

This young officer was of opinion that all would be well if he could get about half an hour's start of the Boers. He would not wait until dusk was fading into darkness, but would start operations as soon as daylight began to wane into dusk. He called for four volunteers. Forty stepped out; and of these he selected four men of great physical strength and absolute coolness. The lieutenant and his little band had set themselves a task perilous enough.

It was to cross the bridge, cut the wire, remove the detonators from the mines, and then to recross and carry away several boxes of dynamite, which had been observed under the last span of the bridge. The Boers, to make assurance doubly sure, had placed these boxes there, so that, if the mines should fail to act, a few Mauser bullets fired into the dynamite would, at all events, wreck the last span of the bridge and render it impassable.

The gallant officer of the Derbyshires and his brave followers crawled cautiously over the bridge. They kept to the side of it because it was painted yellow, and against paint of this colour their khaki uniforms did not show. Joy! The sentry is absent. In a whisper orders are given. "Here, pull out these little things—they are the detonators. Put them in your pockets. Now for the wire. It will be better to capture it altogether, for they can never lay a fresh wire, though they might mend a cut one. Haul away, and do it quietly." The men pull in the long wire and coil it up so neatly and handily that you might mistake them for sailors, and in a few minutes the whole of the mining apparatus is out of gear, and the electric wire is all neatly coiled up on the British bank of the river.

Still no sign of a Boer! One feels rather sorry for that absent sentry. When he is caught, he will probably be shot. One more effort. We must have those cases of dynamite.

The men, elated with their success so far, slip over the bridge as noiselessly as cats and as quickly. The gloom is gathering, and it is almost impossible to see them as they run along the side of the waggon bridge to the northern bank. They reach it in safety, and in a few seconds have descended under the bridge and carried the boxes of the dangerous explosive up to the bridge itself. The young lieutenant, not knowing whether he may be interrupted on the return journey or not, goes forward towards the Boer trenches to do a bit of scouting. Everything is as still and quiet as a graveyard until ——! The officer swears under his breath as he feels his foot touch something alive. Then as he turns and runs at a speed that would win most foot races, a plaintive howl breaks the stillness. He has trodden on the tail of a dog. The weird noise rouses every Boer in the trenches. Keen eyes peer into the dusk, and the Dutchmen espy phantom figures tearing across the waggon bridge, carrying each one of them something under his arm.

It is Popham and his gallant four, running away with the dynamite. Every burgher seizes his rifle and empties his magazine time and time again.

But the Derbyshires have luck. Nay more, they have planned their enterprise so well and carried it out so daringly that they are almost bound to succeed. They do succeed; and the bridge at Bethulie is safe for the passage of Gatacre's army.

The exploit of the young lieutenant and his men has perhaps greater consequences than they had any idea of at the time. It is not too much to say that the saving of the waggon bridge at Bethulie was the salvation of Lord Roberts's army at Bloemfontein. How this came about will be explained in another chapter. Here it is sufficient to record the incident.

It should, however, be mentioned that Captain Grant, R.E., one of Gatacre's aides-de-camp, also had a hand in saving the bridge. After Popham had annexed the wires and the detonators and the dynamite, it occurred to Grant, who was a

sapper and miner by trade, that if the Boers had half the slimness with which they were credited, they would still find a way to blow up the bridge—namely, by dropping shells on the dynamite mines. So, to cut off the last chance, Grant himself crawled across the bridge in darkness and descended into the holes made by the enemy, took out the explosives there contained, and dropped every charge into the river below. It was a cool piece of work, carried out in a style altogether worthy of the great regiment to which this officer belonged.

But, although the bridge was saved, the British were by no means over it yet. All the next day the Boers stuck to their trenches, firing shells into the farm, now occupied by the Sherwood Foresters, and keeping up a spattering rifle fire. But they had apparently made up their minds to evacuate the position, and on the following morning, after a reconnaissance in in force, General Gatacre, with his staff, mounted infantry, scouts, and Cape Police, crossed the bridge and advanced on the town of Bethulie, three miles to the north. They were met by a man bearing a white flag, who informed the British general that the Boers had evacuated the town, leaving behind a small amount of ammunition.

Bethulie surrendered! Every shopkeeper and householder in the town seemed to have bought or borrowed the largest piece of white calico he could find and manufactured it into a flag. Never surely was such a curious sight seen before of a town with a white flag flying from almost every building. We say *almost*, because the hotel of the place had run up not a white flag but a Union Jack.

In this, the first Free State town taken by General Gatacre's force, the honour of running up the official Union Jack over the public buildings was accorded to Major Meylan, who had commanded the Cape Police in the Molteno district ever since General Gatacre took command there.

The scouts immediately set out after the retreating enemy, determined to give them no rest and no time to destroy the railway line. In the latter they were successful, but as for catching the Boers, when those mobile gentlemen had nearly a day's start, they might just as well try to catch an eel in a sack full of snakes.

Two men, Captain Hannessy of the police and Captain Turner of the scouts, accomplished an exploit only second to the exploit of Popham and Grant in the saving of the bridge. Hannessy was a staff officer, and had been ordered to go to the railway station and take command there. He soon put himself at the end of the telegraph wire, and flashed a message along to Springfontein. He was answered by an Englishman—one of the Free State railway employees—who told him that the line was clear up to that point, but that at Springfontein there was a Boer rear-guard looking after some rolling stock.

Hannessy had an idea, and he sought out Captain Turner, to whom he communicated it. Turner thought the notion a good one, and away went the pair of them on a trolley. They arrived at Springfontein without adventure, and saw two trains standing in the station. These were the trains they had come to take. Quietly—for their whole plan depended upon surprise — the two dare-devils scouted about the station. Not a Boer was to be seen, but they knew perfectly well that some Boers must be about the place. Having failed to track the enemy

by sight, they were mercifully guided to him by hearing.

Hannessy suddenly plucked his companion by the sleeve. "What's that?" he whispered. *That* was a noise uncommonly like a snore, and creeping in its apparent direction, the two Englishmen found themselves in one of the offices of the station, where they espied on the floor eight slumbering Boers, every man with bandolier and rifle by his side.

Now began the ticklish part of the operation. Turner stood with his revolver ready, while Hannessy stepped amongst the sleepers and quietly removed every man's weapon. Having carefully piled the Mauser rifles near the door, Hannessy woke the Boers up. As soon as they opened their eyes, "You are my prisoners," he said.

It was really comical to see the look of blank amazement that stole over the features of those farmers, as every man stretched out his hand for his rifle and grasped nothing. Hannessy smiled cheerfully upon them. "Oh! you are unarmed," said he, "and if you don't come quietly with us we shall be obliged to shoot you." Some of the Boers made a few remarks not usually heard at prayer meetings, and then decided to go quietly.

The two British officers led their captives to a truck and fastened them up there. Turner mounted guard over them with a pistol in each hand, and a gentle intimation that the first man who tried any games would be shot. Hannessy, in the meantime, hunted about until he found an engine-driver. He rather calculated on finding an Englishman to fill that capacity, because the railways in both Republics were, for the most part, worked by English engineers and mechanics, the Boers having no skill that way. The captain of police was not disappointed He found an English engine-driver. Together they got both the trains under way, and that night steamed out of Springfontein Station to Bethulie, where they handed over their eight prisoners, two engines, and forty trucks and carriages, to a delighted general.

The whole performance sounds more like one of the exploits of Buffalo Bill than the act of sober-minded English soldiers. Still, it is true, and the deed was a useful one. Gatacre congratulated them both personally, for he wanted rolling-stock badly, in view of the fact that the railway line was broken at the river, and he could not, therefore, use any of his own rolling stock on the north bank.

No doubt the determination of General Olivier to abandon the defence of the Orange River had been assisted by the news that Brabant was at Aliwal North, forcing the passage of the river there.

After the victory at Labuschagne's Nek, Brabant set out on the 7th of March for Jamestown, with 2,000 men, two field guns, and six 7-pounders, and with a fierce determination to hurl the Boers back over the border. The first day's march carried the force to Oorlog's Poort, a sort of defile amongst the hills. Brabant was hampered by lack of means of transport, otherwise he would have reached Jamestown that night. As it was he had to bivouac at the place mentioned, in a very dangerous position. In point of fact, there was very little bivouacking in the sense of lying down to sleep, for the hills in front had to be occupied in force, and the number of pickets required almost exhausted the whole division.

With daylight Brabant was on the move again, and breakfast time found him in Jamestown. The inhabitants here

were largely English, and their joy at deliverance from the Boer yoke knew no bounds. The inevitable Union Jack was re-hoisted over the Court House, as a visible sign and token that her Majesty's forces were once more in possession of her Majesty's dominions.

So Brabant formed an advance guard of the 1st Regiment of Brabant's Horse and two 7-pounders, under the command of Major Henderson. These were ordered to push on rapidly and occupy Aliwal without delay.

The town forming Brabant's objective

HIT!

The enemy had fallen back on Aliwal, and Brabant was eager to pursue them, so as to hustle them back over the river; but the Colonial general was doomed to chafe for two days in idleness, by reason of the difficulty of getting up supplies. On the 10th of March the advance was resumed, and in the afternoon Aliwal North was only eighteen miles away.

lay on the bank of the Orange, being screened by a ridge of hills about five miles to the south. On arriving at the top of this ridge, Henderson's scouts came galloping in at top speed to say that the enemy were leaving Aliwal. He promptly put his horses to their best speed and rode at a hard canter to the bridge. At 9.30 a.m. on the 11th, two troopers of Brabant's

Horse crossed the bridge into the Free State, and in a few minutes Henderson's advance guard rode through the streets of Aliwal.

A Boer laager was observed at the back of the town, and on this the two 7-pounders were promptly trained. But almost as soon as the British guns opened, the Boers, perceiving that they were only pursued by a small force, turned to fight.

For several hours a brisk rifle fire ensued between Henderson's men and the Boer rear-guard. At a quarter past eleven Brabant himself arrived, accompanied by General Dalgety, two more 7-pounders, and some of the Cape Mounted Rifles. The Boers now brought up two Krupp guns, which severely shelled Henderson's men. It seemed also that the Boer commandant had turned round in earnest, and was fighting to win. Brabant was obliged to order a retirement, and he did, in fact, take his men back over the river. But he was able to throw up entrenchments on the Cape Colony side in such a way as absolutely to command the bridge.

Henderson's movements, notwithstanding this retirement, had been absolutely successful. He had, by keeping hard on the heels of the enemy, preserved the Aliwal bridge absolutely intact, and so facilitated the passage of the Colonial Division into the enemy's country.

Photo:] [*Lieut. A. C. Girdwood.*

A NOVEL SENTRY BOX.

CHAPTER LXX.

BLOEMFONTEIN—SUPPLIES—AND A FOLLY.

LORD ROBERTS had now completed the first stage of his journey—had accomplished the first part of his mission; and his feats of arms and of generalship in Asia sank into insignificance when compared with his deeds in Africa.

Yet the army at Bloemfontein stood in no very enviable position. It was, indeed, in considerable peril.

A brief survey of the situation will show the truth of both assertions.

Arriving at Cape Town on the 10th of January, by the 11th of February the field-marshal had collected between the Orange and the Modder an army of 44,000 men. The sixth day saw the relief of Kimberley and the flight of Cronje. The masterly march of that general and his dash through the line that was being drawn round him caused the British commander to wheel his army round and follow in pursuit. Then came the investment and capture of the Boer and his force and the concentration of the army at Osfontein.

The 13th of March saw the British army in Bloemfontein, after a march of 120 miles from the railway on a supply of food lamentably insufficient owing to the capture of three-fourths of the supplies.

From Osfontein onwards the march was so rapid as to defy opposition and to carry consternation into the ranks of the enemy, and for the greater part of the way the huge army had been, in effect, a flying column. That is to say, at Poplar Grove a post had been established—the last of a series which stretched all the way from the Modder; but from Poplar Grove to Bloemfontein there was no line of communications. Lord Roberts had detached himself from his base, leaving a gap of about seventy miles.

It was a daring thing to do—a thing seldom attempted; and only to be justified by success. But it was a move not undertaken without calculation. For Lord Roberts saw that it would be difficult and dangerous to attempt to hold a line of road stretching 120 miles across the veldt. Such a line would require an enormous number of troops if it were to be held securely and if convoys were to be protected. Moreover, no supplies could be sent except by ox-waggons, moving not more than about ten miles a day at best. And besides, the task of feeding such an army by means of transport such as this would require an enormous number of waggons and draught beasts; for it takes about ten tons a day to feed and supply 1,000 men in the field—a quantity which includes, besides food, ammunition, clothes, medicine, and forage. Wherefore Lord Roberts had decided to capture at once the quickest line of supply—the railway.

Since the capture of the great convoy, the men had lived on quarter rations; and even then the food supply was nearly exhausted by the time the Free State capital was reached. Never, in fact, was an army nearer starvation point than was the

victorious army of Bloemfontein. Worse, if anything, was the sickness. Men who had drunk for days the filthy waters of the Modder after it had filtered through the Boer laager, men who had bivouacked in pouring rain upon the open veldt, men who had been obliged to descend into the Boer laager after Cronje's surrender, had taken into their bodies the germs of typhoid.

Never did soldiers behave more heroically. From Osfontein to Bloemfontein many fell by the way, succumbing to the fell disease. But there struggled on in the ranks scores who kept themselves up by sheer determination. They ought to have been in hospital; but they braced themselves up, they set their teeth and struggled on, resolved to pull trigger and carry bayonet and lance in the struggle for the capital. And after the goal was reached they dropped like flies.

There was no hospital nearer than Kimberley. There was no accommodation for the sick except the field hospitals; and these, wofully reduced in number by the exigencies of the service, barely sufficed to accommodate the men wounded at Driefontein. The heart of "Bobs" bled for his poor fellows; but what could he do? He could neither send his wounded and sick down to the base nor bring up therefrom the necessary comforts, assistance, and accommodation.

Death began to hover over the camp. Fever, more terrible than wounds; disease, more dreadful and more unrelenting than battle, decimated the ranks of that fine army which had performed a march almost unprecedented in history.

"War, pestilence, and famine," said a great orator, "are the three most terrible scourges of the race." The British army at Bloemfontein had experienced the first, was experiencing the second, and stood within an ace of the third.

Thus the first thing to be thought about after the British army had occupied Bloemfontein was the establishment of railway communication with the south. For the Cape was really Lord Roberts's magazine of supply—England being practically his base.

Unless the rail were seized and utilised, the line of communication was by rail from Cape Town to the Modder, and by road from Modder River camp to Bloemfontein. But this line was very long. It was two sides of a triangle; and one side was, for practical purposes, three or four times as long as the other, though in actual mileage it was short; for it was only possible to forward supplies by ox-waggons, the slowest conceivable form of transport as well as the most expensive. Besides, that line was incomplete, and the oxen and waggons were scarce.

It was imperative to secure the third side of the triangle—the direct railroad to Cape Town, lest the army should perish of hunger. True, Lord Roberts might have lived "on the country" for a considerable period had he been so disposed. He might, in other words, have plundered the Free State—might have allowed his men to "commandeer" the corn and cattle of their enemies. But Roberts was a plain man. He was a man who thought straight. And to him the Taal word "commandeer" rendered itself into the English "steal"; and he was old-fashioned enough to have some regard for the words that the Almighty engraved upon tables of stone amidst the thunders of Sinai.

"Thou shalt not steal" was to the simple-minded soldier imperative, and not to be evaded by slurring over an ugly word. And his *fiat* went forth that there was to

be no "commandeering." And the army knew that Roberts of Kandahar meant what he said: that he was a disciplinarian whose orders were law to his men; and woe betide the man who "commandeered" his neighbour's ox or anything that was his.

Notwithstanding the vigilance of the field-marshal there is no doubt that many chattels, especially horses, were stolen by the men. But the plundering was so slight as to be infinitesimal. And what was even more gratifying, there was a complete absence of crime—a circumstance remarkable if not unprecedented.

The fact was that Lord Roberts was a man of deep religious feeling and principle. He was firmly resolved not to add one unnecessary horror to war. And the soldiers behaved as they did behave largely because his example was ever before them, and because not a man of them but would have suffered any privation rather than lose the good opinion of the beloved "Bobs." Popularity is often used for base ends: for the furtherance of schemes of private advancement; for purposes of individual aggrandisement. But the great Little Man who had drawn his country and his comrades from the Slough of Despond and placed them on the pinnacle of victory, used his popularity solely for the well-being of mankind.

That is his highest fame: his most imperishable monument.

Care for the army demanded an immediate opening-up of communications with the south. Lord Roberts had the railway at one end. Gatacre was pushing on from the other. It was vital that the line between the two should be immediately cleared, repaired, and made fit for traffic.

On March 15th Roberts reached out his hand to Gatacre. And the hand was a gigantic one, consisting of two battalions of the Guards, the 1st Scots and the 3rd Grenadiers. With these and with four guns General Pole-Carew set out from Bloemfontein by rail, forty mounted infantry accompanying the party as scouts. The rolling-stock captured by means of Hunter-Weston's daring stroke came in useful now. Had the Boers been able to run away with it Lord Roberts must have been delayed at least a week in joining hands with Gatacre, and much longer in getting supplies through.

Pole-Carew had been ordered to push south with all speed to Springfontein, about eighty miles south; and Gatacre's orders were to come north with all speed to the same place. Elsewhere you have read how "Old Back-acher" carried out his part of the plan—carried it out with skill and success. He was now hurrying on from Bethulie, eager to be first at the rendezvous.

Thanks to the rapidity of the march on Bloemfontein, and to Gatacre's activity in the south, the Boers from Stormberg had been unable to retire along the railway, destroying it behind them. They were fearful, if they tried this, of being caught between the hammer of Roberts and the anvil of Gatacre. Consequently they had edged off the line of rails, seeking safety in the open country.

The Guards were thus able to proceed down the line at good speed. The night of the 15th (March) saw them at Edenburg, forty miles from the starting-point, and the 16th found them at Springfontein. The journey had been performed without accident, and the pilot engine scouting ahead of the transport trains encountered no obstacles.

It is worthy of record that the drivers and stokers to man the trains in which the

Guards ran to Springfontein were all men drawn from the ranks of Lord Roberts's army. Moreover, there were found plenty of mechanics, skilled men, who tested and examined the engines and carriages and executed the slight repairs found necessary. It would not have been safe to rely on the Free State railwaymen for these offices. Also it was found quite easy to place at Pole-Carew's disposal men for breakdown gangs, who could have repaired *secundum artem* any slight damage to the permanent way. As it happened these men were not needed.

All along the route the people came in to surrender and submit themselves to the mercy of the conquerors. Landdrösts approached General Pole-Carew, and received assurance from him of protection for their people in exchange for promises of submissive behaviour. And at Springfontein the Guards took possession of 500 rifles, considerable quantities of food, and, what was even more important, more railway rolling-stock.

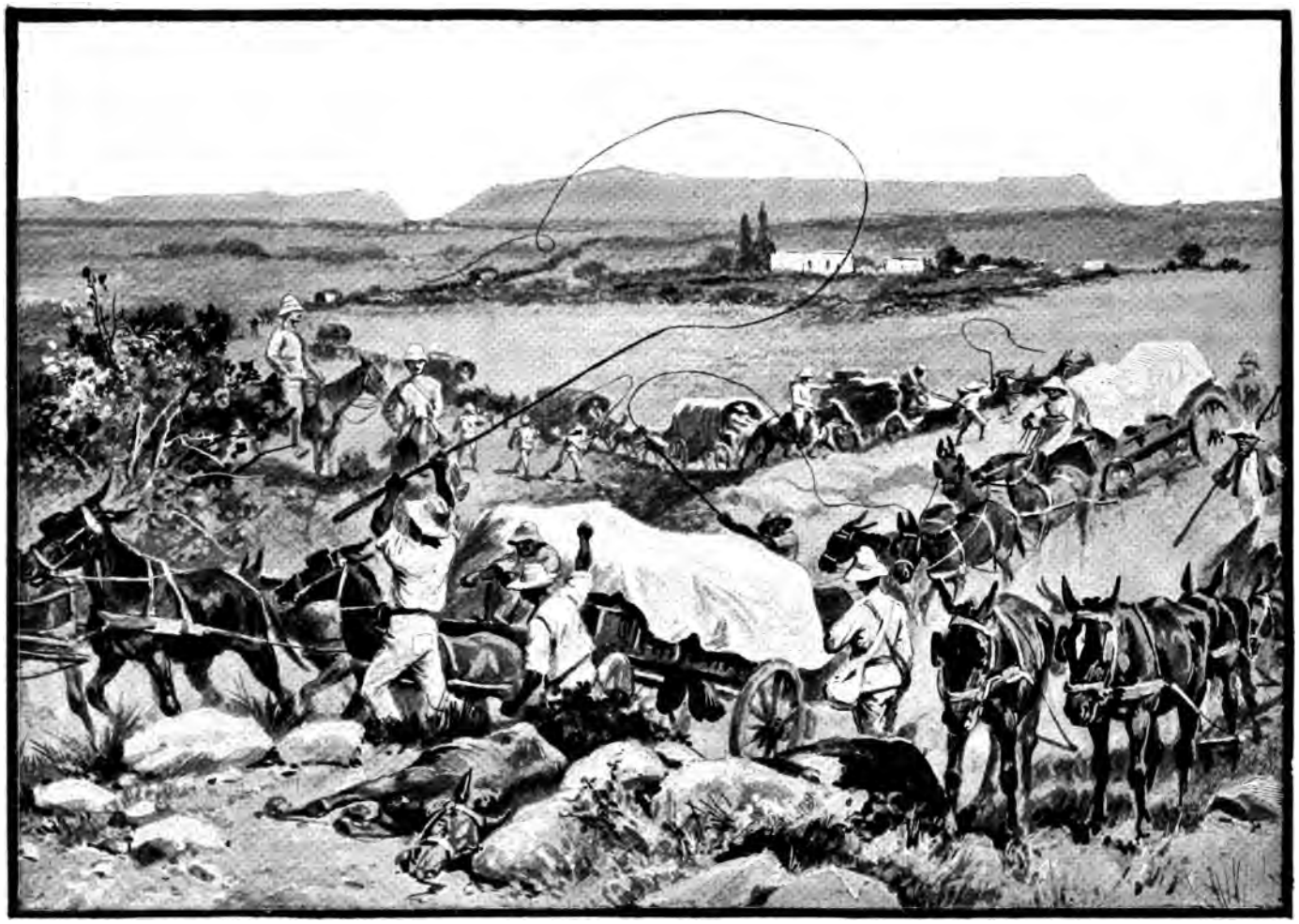
When Pole-Carew arrived at the rendezvous he found that he had been to some extent anticipated. Earlier in the day Captain Hannessy and Captain Turner had made their raid of which we have spoken, and had even removed an engine. But the two officers had not attempted to occupy the place. Scarcely, however, had General Pole-Carew's command entered and taken possession than a small body of horse came galloping in from the south. It was "old Back-acher" himself, with a scanty escort of Colonials, anxious for the glory of being first into the town.

Pole-Carew had established communication with Gatacre—thus opening up the line of communication from East London to Bloemfontein; and his next move was to join hands with Clements. That general was at Norval's Pont, doing his uttermost to repair the bridge over the Orange at that place so as to open up the line from Cape Town. Springfontein, as you may see from the map, is the place where the two lines converge, running thence in a single line to the Free State capital. With a strong detachment the Guards' general ran down the railway to Norval's Pont, where he found Clements' engineers constructing their temporary bridge.

Clements and Gatacre promptly moved their men up to Springfontein, leaving parties to guard the sections of railway line between that place and the Orange; and the Guards, having done the job they had been sent out to do, took train once more, and on the 17th March returned to Bloemfontein to join the rest of the brigade.

Let us once more note how the railway lines worked. There was a line direct from Cape Town to Bloemfontein, crossing into the Free State at Norval's Pont. With this line there communicated, by way of De Aar Junction, the line from Cape Town to Kimberley. Then there was another line from Port Elizabeth and Port Alfred, crossing the Orange at Bethulie. So that, by joining hands with Gatacre and Clements, Lord Roberts had opened the way to three ports. Than this nothing could have been better, nothing could have simplified the supply question to a greater extent but for one fact:—All the lines met at Springfontein. From Springfontein to Bloemfontein there was only a single line of rails, the same for the up as for the down traffic. So that for a distance of eighty miles 40,000 men were dependent for their food upon a single line.

Add to this, the most serious drawback,



A MAIN "ROAD" NEAR BLOEMFONTEIN.

the fact that the railway bridge at Norval's Pont had been so thoroughly destroyed as to require sixteen days to put it in repair, and that the railway bridge at Bethulie was also broken down, and some idea of the difficulties of the situation can be formed. The daily 400 tons of supplies had to be detrained at Norval's Pont (for hardly anything came by way of Bethulie), dragged across the drift there by oxen, and embarked on rail again. The labour was enormous.

Add, again, the fact that there was a serious deficiency in rolling stock—so much so that to the last great ox-drawn convoys had to be sent up daily from Springfontein. Nor was it until a continual stream of these had been set flowing that the army was fed. Even then no one had many luxuries.

"I'd rather," said a soldier who had served in India, "go through three years' Tirah campaign than three months of this. 'Cos why? Becos there they feeds yer. Yer 'as ter fight: likewise ter march. 'Tain't all milk an' 'oney there. But they feeds yer. But 'ere they gives yer arf a ration o' bully-beef an' biscuit as though they was a-doin' of yer a favour. Swelp me."

And it was, indeed, almost pitiful to see great, strong, healthy young men wasting such magnificent appetites. Sweet things were at a premium. In one camp of the C.I.V.'s two men of University standing almost came to blows one day over a spoonful of jam! Sugar was more precious than silver—you could not buy, with half-a-crown, the weight of the coin in sugar.

Yet the men, such of them as did not drop through dysentery or enteric, were in splendid health. And here is a phenomenon. Scores of them put on weight. The following is an extract from a letter written by a volunteer at the front: "We have not had a square meal since we got here. I could have eaten at one sitting all the food I have had for the last fortnight." Yet in the same letter the same man writes: "I have not been so well since I left school, and have put on 8 lb. since we landed at Simon's Bay. J—— has put on 12 lb." Nor was this experience a solitary one. In scores of cases men complained of lack of food, and at the same time admitted putting on weight. Let some budding Abernethy explain. We are at a loss.

There was one more serious question to be faced by Lord Roberts; and that was the question of remounts for his cavalry and mounted infantry. The recent operations, in which the mounted troops and artillery had played so conspicuous a part, had resulted in terrible mortality amongst the horses. And not only had many animals died of overwork and starvation, but numbers more had been left on the veldt. It was a daily occurrence for a score of troopers to find their horses sink under them. The march could not be delayed; so the only thing to be done was to remove the saddle, bridle, and accoutrements, and leave the poor beast to take care of itself. Doubtless many of these derelict horses recovered, to the vast improvement of the strain of horseflesh in South Africa; but they were, all the same, dead to the army. When Lord Roberts reached Bloemfontein many cavalry regiments could muster no more than 200 horses; and the remount question became acute.

The severe mortality amongst the horses was due to many causes, of which the distances travelled constituted the least. First, there was the overloading. Every cavalry horse had to carry, in addition to

his rider, a dead weight of 160 pounds—saddle, sword, carbine, and bucket, and so forth. Many a man of military skill began to think that the British cavalry sacrificed too much to mere spectacular effect—and to ask why such things as rations and top-coats should not be carried in light carts. Others even advocated the abandonment of the sword and lance altogether. Obsolete weapons the "white arm" began to be called—as obsolete as bows and arrows.

A second cause of the using-up of the mounts was the absurd fashion of keeping men in the saddle even during a long halt. Almost without exception the Lancer, or Hussar, or Dragoon would sit on horseback all day after he had once mounted until the time came for him to dismount and prepare to camp or bivouac for the night. On this point Lord Roberts issued a sharp order to the officers commanding mounted troops.

A third cause of mortality—the most serious and fatal cause of all—was to be found in the way horses were sent to the front in an unfit state. From the four corners of the world they arrived at Cape Town—horses from England and Australia, from Canada and India, from the Argentine and New Zealand. After their long voyage and confinement on board ship these animals ought to have been carefully trained for a period of several weeks in a remount camp, and then sent to the front in the most careful manner. Instead of that, they were run up to Stellenbosch, hastily broken in, and sent *viâ* De Aar on a journey of 300 miles by rail, packed in open trucks like herrings in a barrel, with sometimes only two or three Cape Boys to look after 200 animals. On the three days' railway journey the poor beasts stood little chance of getting either food or water; and it was not to be wondered at that they should arrive at Bloemfontein utterly out of condition. Once there, however, they had to be put to work immediately, with results — naturally — disastrous.

At the outbreak of the war the Government might have had several thousand Basuto ponies, hardy, wiry animals, sure-footed, good weight-carriers, and thoroughly acclimatised, at the price of £15 a-piece. The offer was not accepted. Now the man who could procure a Basuto or Boer pony thought himself lucky. And the half-useless horses sent to the front cost from first to last about £100 each.

All this was in consequence of the original decision of the War Office to employ infantry almost exclusively. No provision had been made for the needs of a large mounted force. And when Lord Roberts took the field and demanded a strong force of horsemen to give his army the necessary quickness of motion, all was hurry-skurry. The necessary horses were collected in feverish haste at whatever prices the sellers liked to ask for them; were hurried over-sea in ships that might or might not be fit for their carriage; and were then thrown to the front, only to arrive there worn and weary, and very little better than some of the wretched beasts they had been sent to replace.

The Australians generally managed to keep themselves in horseflesh. It was noticeable also that as time went on many of them were mounted on the hardy horses of the country. If Heaven helps those who help themselves, then the stalwart troopers from "down under" ought to have received a liberal measure of assistance. For they helped themselves liberally.

Such were the difficulties to be faced by the veteran commander—an impending

famine, a cavalry division almost horseless, an epidemic of typhoid fever on a short supply of hospital accommodation. Not to mention an enemy dismayed but not yet subdued.

But the magnificent courage and resourcefulness of the man only showed themselves more splendid in the fierce light of difficulty. He had come to subdue the Dutch Republics for the Queen ; and Roberts had issued a proclamation assuring the burghers of the defeat of their army and the loss of the war as far as they were concerned, and promising immunity to such of them as should deliver up their rifles and take the oath not to participate further in the war. French was sent out to the east of Bloemfontein with the composite regiment of the Household Cavalry, the 10th Hussars, three companies of

Photo :] [*V. P. Edwards, Littlehampton.*

DELAGOA BAY.

to that task he set himself with unabated energy, difficulties only calling forth fresh means to overcome them.

Having restored his communications—or, rather, having made a line of communication for himself—he set to work to bring into subjection the surrounding country. He also extended a huge ring of pickets round Bloemfontein at a distance of from ten to fifteen miles in all directions.

The horses of the Cavalry Division were worn and weary, but they were not allowed to rest and recruit. The first service required of them was to go on what they called a "bill-sticking expedition." Lord Rimington's Guides, a battalion of mounted infantry, and two batteries of artillery. He was to go out as far as Thaba N'chu, distribute copies of the Proclamation, exact submission from local authorities, and receive and administer the oath to such burghers as came in and delivered up their arms.

The expedition started on the 18th of March, and on the 20th arrived at Thaba N'chu,* a town standing at the foot of a mountain of the same name, which mountain forms one of a considerable range. The Thaba N'chu district was not very

* Thaba N'chu means the Black Mountain.

well populated with whites, but there was a large native population. Although the country was hilly, it was well cultivated and fertile enough.

While at Thaba N'chu the cavalry general received the submission of some of the inhabitants and that of the landdröst. Up to this time no opposition had been met with and no sign of the enemy seen. The country was sparsely peopled, but such Free Staters as were found declared that they had had enough of the war, and that the Free State would soon give up hostilities.

French had another object in view in his march into the Thaba N'chu district. There was a flour mill about twenty-five miles from the Black Mountain, in the direction of Ladybrand. This flour mill was a great institution, being the only place of the kind, where corn was ground and flour turned out in large quantities by modern machinery, in the Free State. It need hardly be said that the enterprising owners of the mill were Englishmen. This mill contained, or was reputed to contain, a large stock of flour, which it was most important for the British to lay hands on. In the first place they wanted it for themselves, and in the second place they wanted to prevent it from falling into the hands of the enemy.

Wherefore, at daybreak on the morning of the 21st, French detached Colonel Pilcher with a squadron of the 10th Hussars and two companies of mounted infantry—about 200 men in all—to push on to the flour mill and take possession of it. The little force hurried, as fast as the emaciated horses could be made to hurry, along the Ladybrand road, and after having ridden twenty-five miles and come within sight of the mill, intelligence came of a big commando advancing from Ladybrand.

Pilcher at once took possession of a ridge of kopjes, and constructed such entrenchments as he could, while two officers of the Hussars volunteered to ride back into Thaba N'chu and procure reinforcements. All that night the 200 were lying under arms, and in the morning their patrols, in scouting the country, made out two forces. One was a big commando under Commandant Grobler, and the other was a force coming from the south, and the whole being apparently on the march to Kroonstad. It was lucky for Colonel Pilcher that both commandoes had received orders to press on without fighting. For General French had not sent the reinforcements asked for, and there was nothing to prevent the Boers from surrounding and capturing the British reconnoitring party.

Finding that his enemy was not disposed to come and attack him, Pilcher determined to execute a little raid. From the flour mills to Ladybrand the distance was eighteen miles, or thereabouts, and Pilcher believed that if he could get into the town by a sudden dash he would bluff the burghers there into surrendering and giving up their arms. Accordingly the colonel, who was an expert in raiding, put his little force in motion and threw himself against Ladybrand on the 26th. A few outposts barred the entrance, but the mounted infantry rushed at these and drove them in in no time. Then the landdröst and a field-cornet, and numbers of prosperous-looking burghers came out into the principal street and became very friendly. The townsfolk vied with one another in inviting both officers and men to luncheon, and Pilcher, delighted with the success of his raid, allowed many of these invitations to be accepted. He did not, however, forget the main chance. He

had heard that the landdröst was in possession of a large sum of Free State money. Accordingly, he arrested that functionary, as well as the field-cornet, and turned loose a few of the mounted infantry to hunt for the gold. It should also be said that Pilcher, with a prudence not always shown by officers at that time, had detached scouts to search the ground round the town and to give warning on the approach of an enemy.

The British had not been more than half an hour in Ladybrand when some of the scouts came galloping in with the news of a large force surrounding the town.

Instantly the importunate hosts became deadly enemies. Men ran into their houses and were presently seen at the windows, showing rifle barrels in hostile attitude. One man who had kindly offered to take care of two officers' chargers while the officers went to luncheon, refused to give them up. A sergeant of the 10th Hussars pistolled the gentleman and recaptured the chargers. It was "Mount and ride" with a vengeance. The men jumped into the saddles of their weary horses, and in loose order cantered out of the town. The chorus of welcome was changed to a hail of bullets, and friendly burghers, who a quarter of an hour before had been offering meat and drink, now had nothing less indigestible to offer than lead.

Pilcher kept his head in the turmoil, commandeered a Cape cart, and into it bundled the landdröst and the field-cornet. He and his men were only just in time to escape. One of the Hussars was struck by a bullet and seriously wounded, but the rest got clean away, though with more haste than dignity. On reaching the open ground outside the town, and after having got past a considerable body of mounted men who galloped to cut them off, it was discovered that five men were missing. These five had a particularly warm time. They had been sent on some little expedition in the town, and were quite separated from the rest of the force. They heard the firing and at once galloped to rejoin their comrades, but scores of peaceful townsfolk were taking pot-shots at them from over the fences of their back gardens. So the little patrol was obliged to right about and gallop for the open. They were lost in an unknown country. Two horses had been wounded and presently dropped, unable to proceed another yard. For miles the unlucky troopers wandered with little to eat and nothing to drink. More than once they saw parties of armed men riding about the veldt, and then they had to hide. For three days the wretched men wandered, until at last, taking by accident the proper road, they walked into Thaba N'chu and there found help.

Pilcher's men retreated as fast as they could go to the mill, whence they had started in the morning. A party of the enemy galloped round under shelter of some hills and headed them off, but the scouting of Pilcher's men was pretty good; so the force did not ride into the trap. Luckily Pilcher had a Maxim gun, and he sent this on ahead to clear the way for him.

Arrived at the mill, a patrol went out to see whether the enemy was following up in force or not. He was. And so Pilcher retired again on his main body at Thaba N'chu. He reached that place just after midnight, having marched nearly sixty miles that day.

While French was out to the east, things had been progressing at Bloemfontein itself. Despite the capture of their capital, it seemed that there were still some Boers who had not the slightest intention of

submitting, and who had the temerity to fight in little bands whenever they came on a small British party. On the afternoon of March 23rd, four officers of the Guards' brigade set out from a place called Glen, about fourteen miles from Bloemfontein, on the railway, with a view to making arrangements for supplies of food and forage from the farmers in the neighbourhood. Colonel Codrington, of the Coldstreams, Colonel Crabbe, Captain Trotter, and Lieutenant Lygon, all of the Grenadiers, with a private of the Cape volunteers as orderly, constituted the party. Colonel Crabbe was the commander of a camp that had been established at Glen, and he was quite pleased with himself when he had visited several farms, made satisfactory arrangements for supplies, and found the country apparently quite settled and peaceful.

Returning in the afternoon, the Guardsmen espied four Boers riding across the veldt in front of them, as if to cut them off. The British party were all armed with Lee-Metfords, excepting Codrington. Here was a chance, it seemed, for a little sport. "Come on, let us round them up," said the colonel of the Grenadiers, and away they all went, recklessly and at full gallop. The private of the Cape volunteers protested in his ridiculous Colonial manner against charging across open ground at an enemy whose numbers you did not know. He was, of course, silenced at once. What did he know about war? Why, if he had as much as heard of the Long Valley at Aldershot, that was the extent of his acquaintance with it. And for him, a private, to question the wisdom of four superior officers, and such very superior officers as these, was almost mutiny. So the five all rode as hard as they could ride for about a quarter of a mile. Then, no Boer being visible, they heard seven reports from seven Mausers. Lygon dropped like a rabbit, a hole through his heart. Colonel Crabbe also dropped, but it was only his horse that had been killed. Trotter felt a tingling sensation about the elbow, and Codrington had a hole through his thigh. As for the wretched orderly—one almost blushes to mention him—he escaped with nothing worse than a bullet in the leg.

The four survivors were soon doing their best to reply to the fire of the men they had ridden to capture. But it was absolutely hopeless for them to attempt anything effective. The Boers were concealed while the Britons were lying in the open without cover. Colonel Crabbe was speedily hit in two places, and, moreover, the Boers kept dropping bullets within inches of their victims.

Then said the colonel of the Coldstreams, "We may as well give in—wave your handkerchief." "I will be hanged if I do," was the reply; "wave your own if you want to." "Mine is red silk. Look here, Crabbe, don't be a fool. Wave your handkerchief if you don't want us all to be killed." Eventually the colonel of the Coldstreams waved his white handkerchief. As for the Colonial volunteer, he did not venture to offer another opinion; but his superior officers having surrendered, he was surrendered with them.

The Dutchmen turned out to be Johannesburg Zarps, the most artful skirmishers and plucky fighters of the Transvaal army. And they were humane to boot. With skilful, though rough and ready hands, they bound up the wounds of their four prisoners. And having "lifted," as they say in Scotland, the field glasses of the officers, they carried them to a farmhouse and procured refreshment for them. A Kaffir boy was despatched to Glen camp;

an ambulance and two doctors soon went out to the farm and brought in the body of the unfortunate young lieutenant, together with the three wounded officers and the ridiculous private of Cape volunteers.

This affair created a great sensation at the time. And the great feeling was neither of sorrow nor sympathy. The British public was simply enraged. And it began to be seen that the generals of the army in South Africa had a task unnecessarily onerous by reason of the fact that many of the regimental officers had not an ounce of discretion.

Sir Redvers Buller's bitter words about blundering into the enemy occurred to everyone. And the Army was to have very soon another lesson, much more severe than this one, of the dangers of blundering about the country and of not believing in the presence of the enemy unless and until he was actually seen.

Q BATTERY AT KOORN SPRUIT.

CHAPTER LXXI.

KOORN SPRUIT : A DISASTER.

WHEN General French returned from Thaba N'chu he left behind at that curiously-named place General Broadwood with his Cavalry Brigade. To be exact, Broadwood had not quite his whole Cavalry Brigade, for his force consisted of the Composite Household Regiment and Pilcher's Mounted Infantry, which included Roberts's Horse and the New Zealand Mounted Infantry. There were with the brigade two batteries of horse artillery, namely, Q Battery and U Battery.

It is as well to observe, perhaps, that the mounted infantry under Pilcher, other than Roberts's Horse and the New Zealanders, was made up of companies drawn from various infantry regiments.

On the 30th of March disquieting rumours reached Broadwood at Thaba N'chu that Commandant Grobler was moving to attack him from the east with a force variously estimated at from 4,000 to 6,000 men, with guns. There was also a rumour of a force moving in the north. Scouts confirmed the rumours, and Broadwood, who had but a tiny force, with no artillery heavier than the 12-pounders of the horse batteries, decided that the most prudent course to pursue would be to retire towards Bloemfontein, to the outermost of the British posts. The nearest one from Thaba N'chu was Sanna's Post, just on the other side of the Modder, an outpost placed there to guard the water-

works from which the town of Bloemfontein drew its supply. Sanna's Post was seventeen miles west of Thaba N'chu and twenty-one east of Bloemfontein.

Before retiring, Broadwood heliographed to headquarters, and a message flashed back from Lord Roberts that the 9th Division and Martyr's mounted infantry would set out at daybreak to his assistance. But he was at liberty, if he thought it necessary, to retire on Sanna's Post.

The Modder was reached at two o'clock in the morning of the 31st March, the column having been marching all night. All along the road there was skirmishing and sniping, with the Boer force advancing from the east ; and Broadwood made disposition of his forces with great cleverness so as to delay the enemy pressing on his rear. In fact he fought a rear-guard action, and fought it successfully.

When the troops crossed the Modder and laagered at the waterworks, the baggage was already there. And the baggage convoy, having had a good rest, was ordered to proceed towards Bloemfontein early in the day. The distance between the Free State capital and Sanna's Post was not more than twenty-five miles, so that the force felt itself fairly safe. Still, it was known that parties of the enemy were hanging about, so that it was resolved to send on the convoy while the troops followed at a little distance.

Before dawn broke, shells from the other side of the Modder pitched into the camp, and as the range was far too heavy for the horse artillery there was nothing for it but every column to move out of range. Quickly and expeditiously enough the waggons were packed, and horses and mules inspanned ; and, as the sun began to peep over the horizon, the column moved slowly forward. It should be stated that about 1,600 yards from the British laager was a spruit, or water course, through which the road lay. As the column moved towards the spruit nobody saw a wiry little man standing on a little mound on the further side, waving a handkerchief. It was a red handkerchief, a danger signal. Who was this man, and why did he flourish his extemporised flag so excitedly ?

On the night of the 30th the acting chief of staff sent to Frank Burnham, the Canadian scout, whose history had been one long series of adventures—adventures reminding one rather of the legends of Leatherstocking, hero of our childhood, than of anything in the sober realm of fact. Burnham had, by long training, so developed his faculties that he could travel in the dark as easily as by daylight, could follow a spoor as well as, or better than, any native tracker, and could even detect the presence of Boers at some considerable distance by smell. In fact, Burnham was a perfect scout ; and one of Lord Roberts's first acts on being appointed to command the South African Field Force was to cable to Burnham, requesting the scout to join him in Africa. Burnham had been there before, and had rendered inestimable services to the Government during the Matabele war. Now he had come at the request of the great field-marshal to try his cunning on the slippery Boers. He was attached to the Intelligence Department, and was a kind of scout-in-extraordinary to headquarters.

He had been sent for, we have said, on the evening of the 30th, and had been requested to proceed from Bloemfontein to Thaba N'chu, and to make a map of the country. He started, accordingly, about midnight, and was within about a mile of Koorn Spruit when he saw, in the

faint light of early dawn, a considerable body of horsemen galloping towards the spruit. As this was within the British outpost line, Burnham at once assumed the figures to belong to the mounted infantry companies stationed at Sanna's Post.

"HORNBY SWIVELS THEM ROUND" (*p.* 841).

Accordingly he ambled towards them without suspecting anything until his nose warned him that these were not British horsemen but Boers.

The scout began to consider what he should do. He was entirely ignorant of the fact of the nearness of Broadwood's force. He imagined Broadwood to be at Thaba N'chu. What he did suspect was that the Boers had slipped round in the night for the purpose of isolating the outpost at Sanna's Post, killing or capturing it, and damaging the waterworks. So he turned his horse's head to the right and rode up the spruit, with intent to cross and make his way round to Sanna's Post to warn the outpost. But he found this to be impossible The Boers had pickets all round, and he could not break through them unobserved. If Frank Burnham had been astride a horse of pace and mettle, moreover a horse fresh and fit, he would have dashed through the Boer line, across the spruit, and this chapter would never have been written. Or, rather, it would have been written, but with very different

ink. But Burnham was mounted on a horse three parts starved and wholly tired —a horse to which a dash was impossible. Wherefore the scout turned about again and rode along the spruit, close to where he had seen the Boers enter. Peering through the half light he espied coming down the veldt towards the crossing of the spruit a long column, close packed; horse batteries, waggons of all kinds, and mounted troops, the giants of the Household Cavalry, and the lithe troopers of Roberts's Horse.

Burnham saw the whole game now. It was an ambuscade, a clever ambuscade. Relying on the guilelessness of the British officer, who would no doubt think that the Boers were all on the other side of the Modder, the Boers had slipped round them and had placed 400 men in ambush under the steep sides of Koorn Spruit. Burnham perceived how daring was the move: for if by chance the ambuscade should fail; if by chance the British should scout with reasonable care; if, in short, the men in the spruit should be discovered, they would be lost men. For they would be surrounded with the greatest ease, and would find their position absolutely untenable against artillery for an hour.

But meanwhile the British column was marching gaily down to the crossing at the spruit—some of the officers in Cape carts, the whole convoy apparently wrapped in the mantle of security. Burnham felt that he must save them somehow, so, creeping cautiously down towards the spruit, he mounted a little hillock about 200 yards from the Boer ambuscade, and taking a red silk handkerchief out of his pocket waved it vigorously. He hoped that one of the British officers would see him, would turn his field-glass on him, and would recognise that it was Burnham, the scout, making danger signals. No British officer did see him; but presently a Boer saw him, and in a trice the great scout found himself surrounded by enemies who hauled him into the spruit, and kept him silent by the persuasion of a rifle held within an inch of his head.

Let it be said that Burnham need never have been captured if he had thought of nothing but his own safety. All the time, from the moment he saw the Boer horsemen, whilst he was trying to effect a passage through their lines, they had never seen him, though he was watching them very closely. That is the art of scouting—to observe the enemy without letting him observe you. And, we repeat, Burnham was a perfect scout. It was only when, compelled to resort to desperate measures, he made himself conspicuous on the skyline in order to attract the notice of his friends, that he fell under the observation of his foes.

The Boer force which attacked Broadwood's column at Koorn Spruit was not the same as that of which Broadwood had heard of at Thaba N'chu, and for fear of which he was retiring. It was a column under De Wet, consisting of about 700 men, the whole of the Free State Army then on foot.

With this force De Wet left Brandfort on the 28th of March, not with any intention of attacking Broadwood, but intending to surprise and capture the British outpost at Sanna's Post and to destroy the Bloemfontein waterworks. The force at Sanna's Post, placed there for protection of the waterworks, consisted of the Yorkshire Company and the Shropshire Company of Colonel Martyr's Mounted Infantry Brigade, and numbering about 200 men. The Boers had four heavy guns and a Maxim-Nordenfeldt.

De Wet left Brandfort on the 28th of March and arrived at a farm on the north of the Modder River on the evening of the 30th. Then, for the first time, he heard of Broadwood's column. His scouts brought intelligence that a British force of mounted men, with a large convoy, was on the move along the road leading from Thaba N'chu to Bloemfontein. De Wet promptly determined to deal with it. He might easily have flung himself across the Thaba N'chu road to block Broadwood's way. But De Wet was a leader who combined a degree of dash, unusual in a Boer, with the tactical skill of a chess-player. He knew that on the other side of the Modder was Koorn Spruit. He knew that the British must cross that spruit to reach Bloemfontein. He calculated that on approaching the Modder the British commander would probably send out scouts and would cross the Modder and then encamp for the night. Thus the British would be between the Modder River on the one hand and Koorn Spruit on the other.

To meet the situation De Wet proposed to send 400 men round to line Koorn Spruit. Another 150 with the guns he would place to the north-east of Sanna's Post, on the north side of the Modder. The remaining 150 he would place across the Thaba N'chu road, also on the north side of the Modder.

Before daylight the artillery should open on the British camp, and, if possible, the thousand men on the north side should also open upon it with rifle fire. Now the British commander would, in all probability, either turn round and fight, in which case the 400 in Koorn Spruit could attack him in the rear, or he would hasten on his road to Bloemfontein, in which case the men in Koorn Spruit would lie in ambush and capture, or cut up, the convoy while it was crossing the spruit. As the force sent thus to lie in ambush would probably have the hardest work to perform, De Wet himself went with them.

It happened exactly as the Dutchman had calculated. When his artillery opened fire from the other side of the Modder, the British officers, finding their artillery outranged, resolved to continue the march to Bloemfontein at once. And, as we have already said, the waggons were inspanned and guns limbered up, and the whole force moved down in a long column towards the drift at Koorn Spruit. The firing was coming from the north. Rifles opened to supplement the shells of the Boer big guns. The British officers seemed to have reasoned thus:—The enemy are in some force to the north of us. They cannot, therefore, be to the south of us. And, accordingly, when the column wended its way southward, not a single scout was thrown out, nor was the slightest precaution taken to ascertain whether any Boers were in that direction.

The only thing that was done was to order the 10th Hussars and the Composite Regiment of Household Cavalry to proceed to the south bank of the Modder, along with two companies of mounted infantry. The mission of this force was to hold off the Boers until such time as the convoy was out of reach, and then, if the Dutchmen were too numerous or otherwise too strong for them, to retire upon the main body. In other words, Broadwood intended to fight a rear-guard action to cover the retreat of the column.

He was soon to find that he had to fight quite another kind of battle.

The Boer artillery dropped shells into the camp at such a rate that preparations for departure were made with the greatest

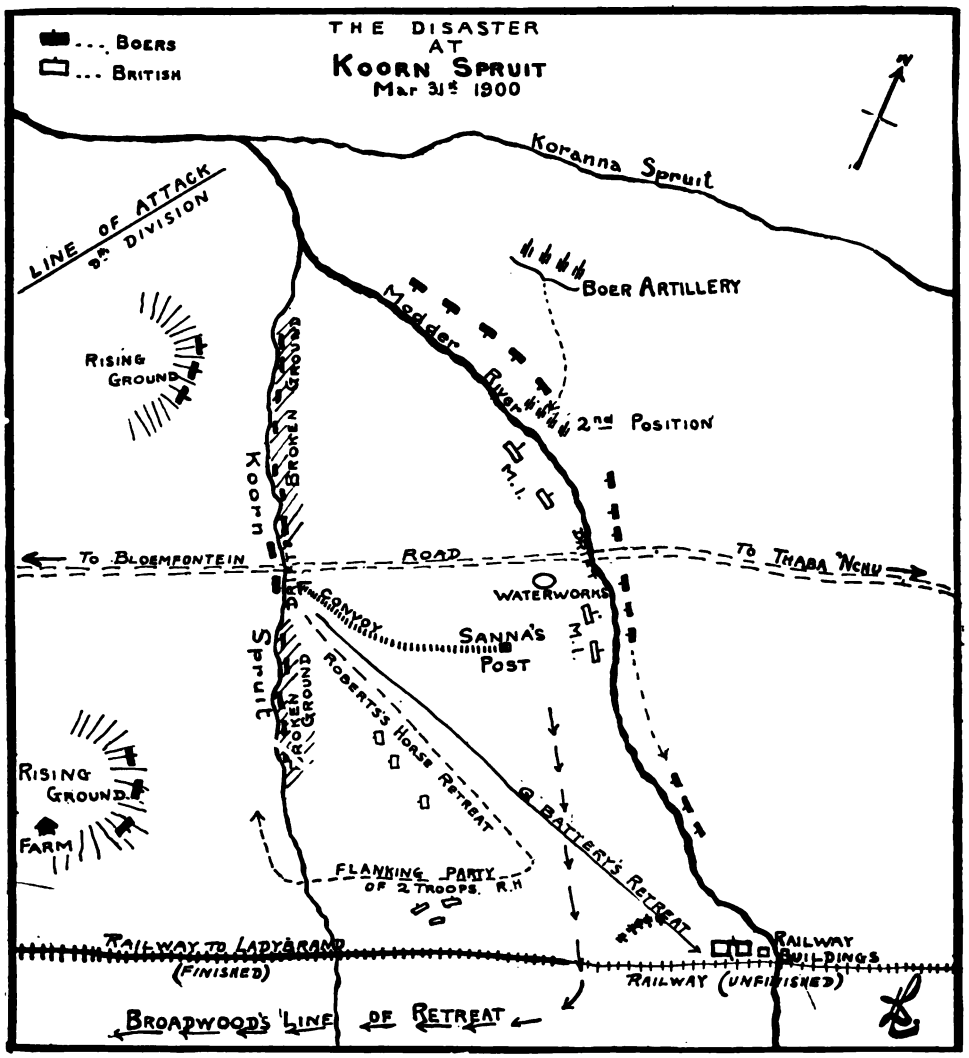


DIAGRAM OF THE POSITIONS AT KOORN SPRUIT.

possible speed. And when the waggons and gun-carriages began to move out of camp, shells continued to drop into them and around them so alarmingly that the drivers and escorts hurried on almost unconsciously to get out of range. The drivers of the transport waggons were Kaffir boys, and it can easily be imagined that before long the whole convoy was in considerable confusion. Nor was this confusion lessened by the fact that the twelve guns of the U and Q Batteries R.H.A. chipped into the column as it was on the move. How, in the name of military order and common sense, two horse batteries were allowed to become mixed up with a

lot of bullock waggons, is more than anyone can explain.

Firing went on in the rear. The Hussars and Household Cavalry found themselves useless before long. The Boers did not come near enough for them to use their carbines, though they themselves were well within range of the rifles of the burghers. But the two companies of mounted infantry took cover on the south bank of the Modder, and replied with spirit to the musketry, which had now become general. The Boer artillery, after a few shells sent amongst the two English cavalry regiments, continued to pepper the convoy, which speedily became more and more disordered.

At about 6.45 a.m. the first waggons dipped down into the drift at Koorn Spruit. What was the surprise of the drivers and the escort when, as each waggon was about half-way across, a few Boers stepped up, apparently rising out of the bowels of the earth, and quietly said "Surrender"—a demand backed up by the presentation of a loaded rifle or a revolver at the head of the person addressed. The Kaffir boys, very naturally, surrendered at once, nor could the few men who formed the escort to the waggons do otherwise than submit. And the Dutchmen quietly installed one of their men in each waggon, compelled the Kaffir driver to lead the bullocks across and to turn to the right, forming, as more and more waggons came up, a park.

Scourged by the shells now dropping on them from a range of nearly 5,000 yards, the hinder part of the column was pressing on the heels of the fore part. The leading gun of U Battery had got into the drift, when the gunners, drivers and escort in their turn encountered the cold barrels of Mauser rifles, and were peremptorily ordered to give up their arms. Two officers, who had also entered the drift, were met in like manner and compelled to deliver up their revolvers. It was almost farcical. Waggon after waggon descended into the drift, and was quietly captured, and its escort disarmed, while the people only a few yards behind knew absolutely nothing of what was taking place.

There is no saying but that the whole of the convoy, not to mention the whole of the column, might have been quietly captured in this piece-meal fashion had not the inevitable jamb occurred. For it is inevitable that when a convoy is trying to cross a drift in a hurry there will be a jamb. Roberts's Horse, who numbered about 300 under Colonel Dawson, were sent down to see what was the cause of the stoppage, and to remedy that cause, for most of these men were veldt men and knew something about crossing drifts. They cantered down alongside the convoy to within about 100 yards of the bank, when a man stood up and cried "Surrender! or we shall shoot you down." It was De Wet himself, whose men were now lining the bank of the spruit on both sides of the drift, with rifles loaded and every finger on a trigger.

Dawson did not stay to parley. "Sections about!" he thundered, and, as one man Roberts's Horse turned about and galloped for dear life. Then the bank blazed with a sheet of flame, a terrific explosion shook the skies, and the troopers of Roberts's Horse grew fewer and fewer. In two minutes they had lost fifty men. In two more they had lost eighty.

And not alone on them did the leaden hail fall. The two horse batteries were close to the bank of the spruit—the foremost gun, as we have said, was actually in the drift, and the other eleven were follow-

ing hard behind. Recognising the importance of crippling the artillery arm De Wet shouted "Fire at the gunners!" and a pitiless lead storm beat about the devoted men of the Horse Artillery. Horses dropped like flies. There was blood on the guns, blood on the limbers: blood of horse and man.

Then ensued a *mêlée* dire and dreadful. The gunners and escort of the gun in the drift, hearing the sudden firing, wrenched themselves free of their captors, darted under the gun carriages, and from behind the spokes of the wheels set up a close and deadly fire. In the drift the slaughter was something to shudder at. Officers emptied their revolvers, men emptied their rifles into the very faces of the enemy. Two men, a Briton and a Boer, would level rifles or pistols and pull the trigger at the same moment. Neither could miss, for the target was almost touching the muzzle of the weapon. Here and there a man fixed his bayonet and ran amok, stabbing and thrusting, until he fell riddled. And to add to the horror of it some Boers on the north bank, seeing the combat below them, and fearing that the prisoners would escape, fired indiscriminately into the struggling mass of friend and foe. Never, except in savage warfare, has there been seen such a confused and bloodthirsty *mêlée* as that fight between the banks of the Koorn Spruit.

On the bank it was little better, except that the combatants were not quite muzzle to muzzle, and that the British column presented a denser and more unresisting target for the Mausers. The five leading guns of U Battery were disabled at the outset. Every horse was shot and almost every man. Roberts's Horse, galloping out of such close range, had dismounted, and were wildly hurling volleys at the bank of the spruit. They themselves could easily be seen, but the Boers, with their customary skill, had rendered themselves almost invisible. The New Zealand Mounted Infantry, who had been considerably in the rear, formed up with cool courage and joined in the fray. And the gunners and drivers who were left wheeled about, endeavouring to save such guns as they might.

The Royal Artillery, whether it be the Royal Horse Artillery or the Royal Field Artillery, has done many courageous acts from the day when Norman Ramsay limbered up and charged through an army to the present time. Q Battery was in rear of the U Battery, but was even then no more than 300 yards from the spruit. It was under command of Major Phipps Hornby, an officer who had never seen active service until this war. But he did not lose his head when he was in a tight place. His voice rose above the din and gave courage to all. With a smartness that few could attain to except the horse gunners, the battery with the sixth gun of U Battery wheeled about and galloped off. The heavy fire, so heavy that previous volleys has been as nothing, pursued the flying gunners. Guns and waggons bumped and rattled over the rough ground as the drivers whipped and spurred their maddened horses to their utmost speed.

Crash! a gun turns over. Two bullets have struck one of the wheel horses and killed it on the spot. The poor beast drops, and as it drops upsets the whole gun and limber. It is hopeless to try to harness a fresh horse at this range. Whip and spur, and the rest of the guns bump and bound over the veldt.

Down goes a waggon. Every horse is dead. "Leave it! And those of you

who are not killed jump on a limber or anything and away."

In less time than it takes to record the act, six guns have been dragged back nearly half a mile, and being now 1,100 yards away from the spruit, Hornby swivels them round and begins to pump shrapnel into the enemy. Eleven hundred yards is not a very safe distance from rifle fire in these days; neither is the position a particularly safe one in other respects, for there is not the slightest cover, and the men who load and fire are exposed to the full blaze of some 400 rifles. They fall, some dead, others only wounded. But those who can stand do stand and manfully work their pieces. There is not an officer who is not killed or disabled except Hornby himself and Captain Humphrys. But every non-commissioned officer, every gunner, every driver, though many of them are little more than boys, works like a hero. The stalwart sergeant-major is every whit as good as any officer of them all. Right manfully the little remnant works the guns, nor are these guns less well served or aimed than if every one had its full complement.

The convoy was hopelessly lost by this time. The only thing to be considered was whether any of the column could be saved. For the Boers were almost all round them. They lined Koorn Spruit and the north bank of the Modder, and all the ground in between was open to their fire. And, to make matters worse, the Boer artillery had taken up a better and more commanding position, whence it could rake the British ranks.

Hornby and his gunners saved the day so far as it was saved. Their gallantry and steadfast conduct alone made escape possible for such of the troops as had not already been captured. But they could not stand much of this. They had taken up their position close to some half-finished railway buildings, and behind the shelter of those buildings Hornby placed such horses as he had left. Moreover, he laid violent hands on some other animals and herded them with his own.

Round after round of shrapnel the plucky horse-gunners aimed at the foe—now pitching a dozen shells at Koorn Spruit itself—now scattering lead over a little hills 200 yards at the back of the spruit, where many Boer riflemen were. But they could not stand it much longer. Man after man rolled in the dust, pierced by the swift bullet of a Mauser or mutilated by the heavier one of a Martini. Curiously enough, only one man of the battery was killed, though forty-eight others were hit.

For half an hour the stubborn contest continued. "We will fight so long as a man can load and fire." Thus the heroic commander of the battery, and he knew the stuff his men were made of. Drivers helped to load and fire the cannon. It was none of their business: their business was to drive. But every man wrought when and how he could.

By all the rules of war the Q Battery ought to have been out of action—effaced—obliterated—in ten minutes. Yet there it was, still alive and viciously barking after being under heavy rifle-fire for thirty minutes. There it was, the six guns standing naked in the open. "Load!" Several demons from the pit, caked with dirt, oozing blood and sweat, flew about. "Fire!" and iron screamed through the air.

"By God! I'm hit." "Then roll out of the way and let's have room." The man rolled out of the way; nor did the speech seem to him callous or brutal.

The sergeant who spoke thought only of saving the guns and the honour of the Army.

Roberts's Horse, or rather the two-thirds of that regiment which were left, were now firing steadily and well. If they had cut and run no one could have blamed them. Of course, to cut and run is never a thing to boast of; but there are times when the most hardened veteran will be excused for doing it. That Roberts's Horse remained steady was only another proof of the great truth that neither clime nor latitude changes the Briton. These men came of the race who "never fight better than in their first battle."

A couple of field guns, wherewith to reply to Boer artillery on the north-east, half a battalion of infantry in reserve to come up and charge the spruit with bayonets fixed, and De Wet's military career would have been ended ere it had well begun. Oh! for an hour of the Faugh-a-Ballaghs; for one fierce charge of the Fighting Fifth. For one rush in line of the Gordons gay. Fifty men, fifty British men with British bayonets could have turned Koorn Spruit into a river of blood. But there was nobody to lead a bayonet charge when a bayonet charge was so badly needed.

The two mounted infantry companies who had been holding the enemy back from the north now began to feel themselves hard pressed. They had to cope with 900 men, a Creusot 94-pounder gun, and three 20-pounders; while they were about 300 in number and without artillery. Still they held on doggedly. No reinforcements could be sent to them—not a man, not a rifle could be spared from the other side of the battle. But they were men, these Yorkshire Tykes and Shropshire lads. Odds did not daunt them—though three rifles against two make odds formidable enough. The Boers crept on, trying to gain the drift across the Modder. The big Creusot gun belched out fire and iron. Its huge shells burst like the eruption of a volcano. The ground was thick with spatterings of dust as Mauser bullets struck the earth. And the 200 calmly, almost contemptuously, loaded and fired, and loaded and fired again.

The cavalry galloped off down the stream to see if they could find a way over Koorn Spruit, and one or two of Rimington's Scouts were also attempting to discover a passage not blocked by the enemy.

And two troops of Roberts's Horse, with conspicuous gallantry, made a great effort to change the fortunes of the day. It was an audacious move on their part, so plucky that it deserved to succeed. For it was no less than an endeavour to turn the enemy's flank. Riding down at a hand gallop towards the spruit, they made for a point several hundred yards below the drift, and so sudden and unexpected was their attack, so skilfully planned and so boldly executed that they actually forced a passage and gained the far side. Then they right-wheeled and charged up the bank, with the object of installing themselves behind the Boers.

But De Wet met the new attack with promptitude. Instantly he had fifty crack shots facing round to his rear; and these greeted the daring troopers with volley after volley. So steady was the Dutchmen's musketry that the British leader had to order "Files about," and gallop to get back by the way he had come. The Mausers sent their deadly messages of death winging through the air. Fast flew the maddened horses; but faster still the bullets of the burghers. It was as though the Angel of Death had passed. For in

High Ground behind Koorn Spruit. Farm on High Ground. Convoy entering the Spruit.

PANORAMIC VIEW OF THE DISASTER AT KOORN SPRUIT

less time than it takes to record the fact every saddle except five was empty.

The battle waged grimly. Never since the war began had the foes fought at such close range. Calmly and steadily the Boers in the spruit emptied cartridges into the mass before them. Just as calmly and just as steadily the horse gunners worked their pieces. They seemed no more flurried than on a field day at Aldershot. They went through the process of loading, aiming and firing as systematically as they would have done on a parade ground; until the Boers, who could appreciate bravery in foe as well as friend, were constrained to admire And many a bearded burgher, as he filled his magazine with five fresh cartridges, was heard to say, "What men!" Then he would bring rifle to shoulder and rapidly despatch five smooth, conical bullets—bullets that pinged on gun and limber, or perchance drew blood from the gunners.

Had there been the slightest unsteadiness in the ranks of Q Battery the Boers would have charged the guns. More than once they made ready for a rush. But the sight of the gunners facing them so calmly and so fearlessly, the knowledge that those gunners carried several rounds of case-shot which they would assuredly use, gave De Wet pause. Better, after all, he thought, to pick off the gunners one by one. So bullets continued to pour into the battery from 250 rifles in the spruit. And not from there alone. Hornby and his devoted men were also exposed to a fierce cannonade from the left rear, to a rifle-fire from the same quarter, and to some annoyance from the direct rear also.

From Sanna's Post signallers were flag-wagging and flashing their dot-dot-dash to Bushman's Kop, the next in the chain of outposts. "Send reinforcements at once. We are hard pressed—almost surrounded." And the signallers on Bushman's Kop flashed the message on to Bloemfontein. French was summoned hastily. "Take two brigades of cavalry and follow up the 9th Division"—the 9th Division (Smith-Dorrien's and Macdonald's brigades) had set out in the early morning—"get ahead of them if you can. Broadwood is hard pressed at the Waterworks." The Silent Cavalryman passed out. Soon bugles blew the "Boot and Saddle" in the cavalry camps, and in half an hour two brigades of cavalry swept out from Bloemfontein at a steady trot along the Thaba N'chu road.

The 9th Division, meantime, was striding in the same direction. The distance to be covered was twenty-one miles; but it was impossible to march in a straight line, and Colvile led his men by rough side tracks which added four more miles to the distance. The marching was magnificent, and none the less so because there was some rivalry between the two brigades. In solid columns they stepped out: Black Watch and Gordons, the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and the Canadian Regiment, the Highland Light Infantry and the Shropshires, the Cornwall Regiment and the Seaforths. Bearded men all: veterans. They marched as to a bridal feast; for they had been told that there was fighting to be done. Pray heaven we get in with the steel! This was all they said: in the sharp accents of Aberdeen, the rising tones of Fife, the slow speech of Shrewsbury, the musical patois of Quebec.

Thus they marched, the dust choking them, the sun baking them; what time the Mausers poured deadly volleys into the unshaken gunners of Q Battery and the stalwart ranks of Pilcher's mounted infantry. The two companies who had been holding back the Boers at the Modder

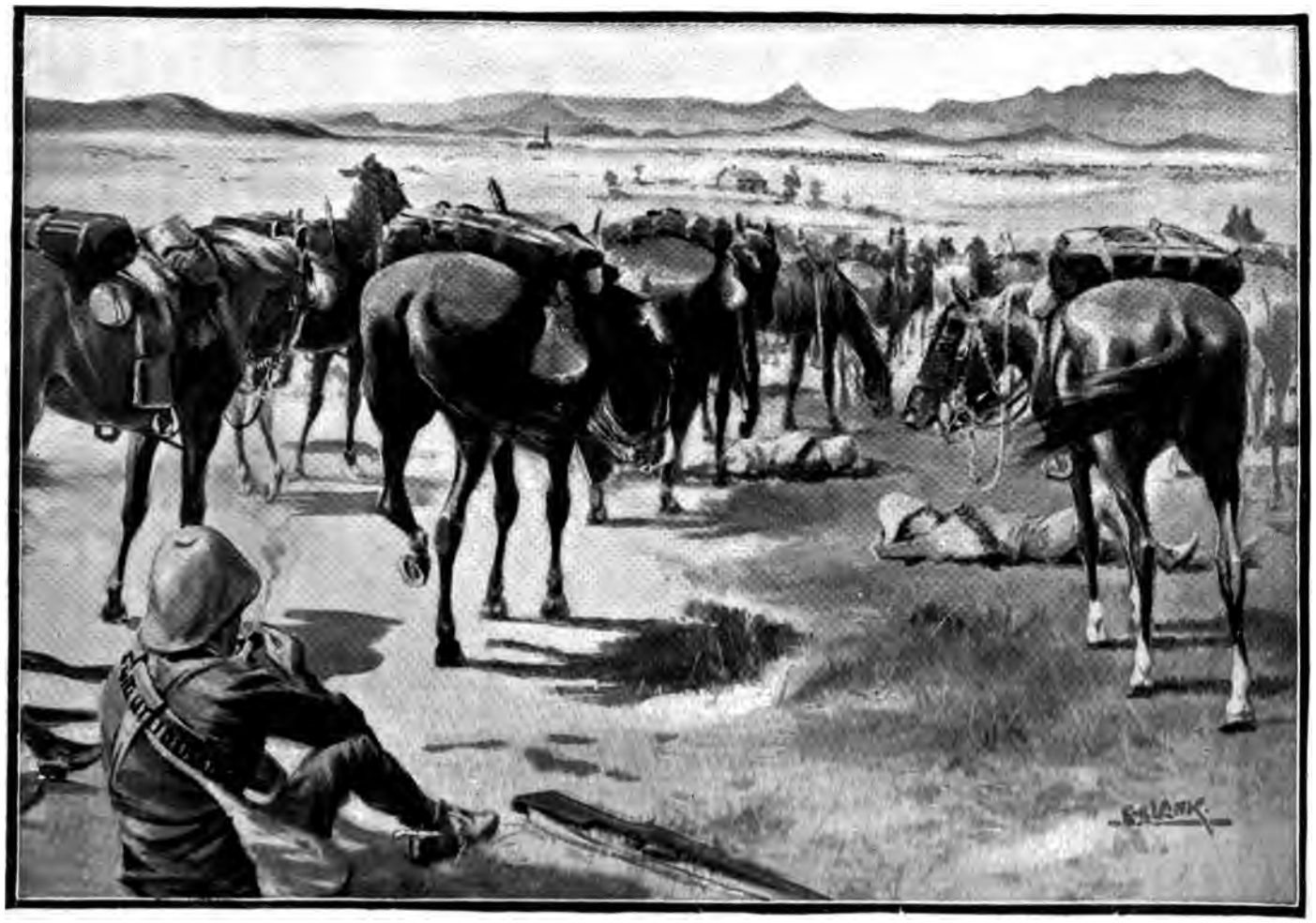
were beginning to feel the weight of metal opposed to them, and fell back by inches, stubbornly contesting every inch of ground. Matters were getting worse as the morning grew older. There were hardly enough men left to work Q Battery.

Seven o'clock — eight o'clock — nine o'clock—the hands almost pointed to ten o'clock, and still the desperate combat continued. The men of Q Battery grew fewer and fewer. Roberts's Horse and the New Zealanders, and the 3rd Regiment of Mounted Infantry, were firing grimly, though with little hope of ultimate escape. The two companies guarding the rear fell back sullenly. But Broadwood had restored discipline—a matter not very difficult with such troops. At about 9.50, Captain Chester-Master, of Rimington's Scouts, came galloping back from the south with the welcome news that there was a way of escape. By going south between the spruit and the river, the column would be able to break through the cordon by which they were almost surrounded.

The Hussars and the Household Cavalry had already gone in that direction, and had taken shelter in a donga. The force was promptly headed round for the south, and as they moved off they faced about alternately; first the New Zealanders would cover the retreat of the rest; then Roberts's Horse would halt and fire while the New Zealanders retired; and then the 3rd Regiment of Mounted Infantry, consisting of the Essex, the Munster, the Shropshire, and the Northumberland companies mounted infantry would dismount, lie down, and fire volleys into the advancing burghers.

If the stand made by Q Battery had been heroic, the retirement of the guns was sublime. The battery waited to cover the retreat of the others, nor did it think of limbering up until the mounted infantry had made its retreat. In that pelting storm of lead it was no light matter to take five guns out of range. The horses, you will remember, had been removed to the shelter of some unfinished railway buildings. (When the war broke out a railway was in course of construction from Bloemfontein to Ladybrand, and the engineers happened to be making the permanent way near Koorn Spruit when engineering was abandoned for rifle and bandolier.) It was quite impossible to bring the horses out to the guns, and harness them within 1,200 yards of rifle fire. The Boer marksmen could hardly miss so big a target as a horse at that distance, especially if the target remained stationary for a minute.

Still, it was not possible to get the guns away from the field without harnessing the horses to them. So Major Hornby gave the word to push the guns back to the spot where the horses cowered. The gunners and drivers responded nobly, but they were too few to drag such a heavy load by themselves. Other assistance was not wanting. More than one man and officer of the regular mounted infantry, the New Zealanders, and Roberts's Horse threw himself from the saddle, ran his horse to the back of the railway buildings, and then stepped out into the fire zone, to bear a hand with the guns. It cost the whole available force every ounce of strength to move one gun at a time. They strained at the spokes until you could hear the muscles of their backs cracking. Officers and men put their muscles into it; nor did anybody work harder or more cheerily than Captain Vandeleur, of the Essex Regiment. The first gun was duly lugged into cover, and the whole party went out to rescue the second. Four times they returned, bearing a cannon with them, and



MOUNTED INFANTRY HALTING ON THE ROAD.

leaving a trail of blood to mark their track. A fifth time they sallied out.

Bullets in increasing numbers whistled round their ears, and threw up little spurts of dirt at their feet. But the rescuers thought not of death or wounds. They reached the gun, and began to haul and push at it. They strained and tugged until the sweat ran from every pore. The gun would not budge. It had sunk a little, and they could not lift it. It must be remembered that each one of these guns is drawn by six powerful horses, and that even then, if the wheels should stick in mud, more draft animals frequently have to be requisitioned. From the bank of the spruit, from the bank of the Modder, a pitiless cross fire swept the ground. Men were hit every minute. Try as they would, they could not shift the gun a single inch, until, afraid that in a few minutes longer he would not have sufficient men left to complete the rescue of the other four guns, Major Hornby ordered the party to leave the weapon standing. Bearing their wounded with them, they returned to the railway buildings, and harnessed the horses there to the guns.

Another difficulty now arose. Many of the artillery horses had been shot. Some were dead, others so severely wounded that they were of no use at all, and others were bleeding. There were not enough sound or partially sound animals to make teams for the guns. So they harnessed to the straps officers' chargers, and the horses of some of the mounted infantry. And with these they made a start after the rest of the column.

A bombardier of Q Battery was not satisfied that the remaining gun should not be rescued. He borrowed horses and went out to save it, but every horse was shot. He went back and procured from some of the mounted infantry more horses, and with these he went out again. Again all the horses were shot. Once more he went out, and the third time he himself was shot. His wound, luckily, was dangerous enough to deter him from making a fourth attempt.

The whole column was now on the move; and the Boers, coming out of the spruit and from the Modder, their own ponies being quite fresh, galloped after the defeated British and fired at close range. In some instances they came up within 250 yards. Sullenly the column wended its way south. Like lions, Pilcher's men turned time after time and faced the foe, fighting a rearguard action without any advantage of position—a very dangerous kind of fight under modern conditions. Brown corpses marked the line of retreat. Nor were all these British. The Boers, though they were victorious, were made to pay a price for their victory. And so for an hour and a half the remnant of Broadwood's force—not, alas, encumbered by any transport—retired before the enemy, fighting every yard.

At last came relief. The anxious eye of Broadwood detected a movement on Bushman's Kop, and a second glance showed him that the troops were British. They were, in fact, Colonel Martyr's mounted infantry brigade, which had been engaged in desultory fighting the whole day. And at about half-past eleven there swept into action the Queensland Mounted Infantry. They very nearly fell into an ambush, and they would have done so if Broadwood had not perceived the trap the Boers had laid. Fortunately, however, he did perceive it, and ordered his own regular mounted infantry, under Colonel Henry, to go in and help the Queenslanders. The battle

was now more even. Broadwood's force could be considered out of danger, for he had escaped out of the net in which Christian de Wet had almost enclosed him, and instead of fighting an enemy who was all round him, he had only to face round to fight his enemy in front.

Now, Broadwood was a man who had seen service. Though still young, he had spent many years in the Soudan, where Kitchener had trained him in the art of catching Dervishes. He promptly turned round, ordered the four guns of Q Battery "Action front," and promptly began a second battle for the rescue of his convoy, lost five or six hours before. It is likely that he would have prevented the Boers from carrying it off if he had been in possession of any artillery fit to cope with De Wet's four big guns. As it was, he failed to drive the Dutchmen from their prey, though he made a bold bid for victory. But the Creusot gun and its smaller brethren recommenced a tremendous shell-fire, under which Hornby's could not live for twenty minutes. Wherefore Broadwood was obliged to order retirement once more, and the column again turned its back to the field of battle, and, covered by Major Hornby's handful of gunners, fell back to join the reinforcements.

When Colvile's division arrived on the field, Broadwood was still fighting hard, his guns in the open, his riflemen with little or no cover. To him came a galloper. "General Colvile desires to see Colonel Broadwood." Broadwood was at boiling point; and this message made him boil over. He cursed the unfortunate galloper. Could he not see that Colonel Broadwood was up to the eyes in work? Could he not see how impossible it was for him to leave his troops at such a time? Back went the galloper to the general. And the general, instead of recognising the difficulties of Broadwood's position, and riding off to see him and consult with him, instead of setting his two brigades in motion, and attacking the Boers with fierceness, remained almost idle long enough for De Wet to fortify the waterworks and take up a position to fight a strong rearguard action. Ultimately, the British general, after Broadwood had extricated himself from the mess, deployed his two brigades and resolved to turn the Modder. Hector Macdonald was on the right, with two regiments in line and one supporting, while Smith Dorrien had two regiments in front on the left and two supporting. Martyr's mounted infantry spread out in front to clear the ground.

It will be seen from a glance at the plan on page 838, that Koorn Spruit runs into the Modder River about a mile north of the spot where the disaster occurred. Colvile's division was advancing not straight along the Bloemfontein road but towards a point a little higher up the Modder than the place where the spruit joins it. The five hundred men whom De Wet had left in Broadwood's rear now came into action to oppose Macdonald. But the Highland Brigade swept on, and were soon in possession of a drift, and had obtained command of it ere night came on.

When darkness fell the infantry division was on the Bloemfontein side of the Modder, but prepared to cross at any moment. They did not cross then and there, partly because Colvile did not relish attacking in the night, over ground of which neither he nor any of his officers knew anything. Moreover, the enemy seemed to be increasing in force; so the British general thought it best to bivouac for the night and wait the arrival of French's cavalry.

BOERS FIRING DOWN ON THE CONVOY.

Meanwhile eighty British waggons and seven British guns, not to mention some 300 British prisoners, were being hurried along the road to Winburg. Those of the wounded who were too badly hurt to be removed were deposited in the tin hut which had been intended to serve as the station of the new railway. And when French arrived the next morning with his cavalry, the convoy had been irretrievably lost. The Boers had now fortified the waterworks strongly, and were engaged in the pleasing task of smashing machinery and cutting off the water supply of Lord Roberts's army.

The cavalry manœuvred carefully down Koorn Spruit, and soon came to the scene of the previous day's disaster. A few Boers were there, but these bolted immediately to the shelter of the waterworks.

All that day (April 1st) the 9th Division and French's cavalry manœuvred about the Modder. Why they did not attack the waterworks and drive out or surround and capture Christian De Wet and his whole force is a problem even now awaiting solution. It was not for want of men or of guns. True, the field artillery could not have coped for long with the 94-pounder Creusot, but a message to Bloemfontein would have brought up a howitzer or two, and, maybe, a 4·7. For once Fighting Mac did not fight, though that was not his fault, nor the fault of the men he led. The Canadians thirsted to be led once more to attack the Queen's enemies. They would have clamoured if they had not been so well bred. The Shropshires swore with unbated breath at being kept dodging about the bank of the everlasting Modder. And on Monday, the 2nd of April, the whole army of rescue returned to Bloemfontein, leaving Christian De Wet and his burghers still in possession of the Bloemfontein waterworks and the country thereabouts.

The Boers had made what is called in Western America "a scoop." What it cost them in killed is not accurately known, but they had over eighty officers and men wounded.

Their losses, however, were as nothing in comparison with those sustained by Broadwood's column. Besides the seven guns and eighty waggons (six more waggons were smashed), the Dutchmen took to Winburg 426 prisoners; and there were 14 killed and 39 wounded of the British. U Battery R.H.A. was almost wiped out. Five of its guns fell into the hands of the enemy, and all its complement of officers and men except two. Q Battery lost two guns—the one abandoned by reason of its overturning during the first wild gallop, and the other left behind near the railway works. Two officers were missing and three wounded, while of the rank and file one gunner was slain and forty men were wounded. Of the rest of the force, Roberts's Horse suffered most heavily. The field was littered with them, shot in the back in that mad ride from under the muzzles of the Mausers.

But the men most to be pitied were not the poor fellows who lay, huddled and motionless brown heaps on the plain. Nor even the suffering wretches who groaned as the blood flowed from holes in back and breast. The men to be pitied most were the 426, who, in sullen silence and with heads downcast, trudged wearily along the Winburg road. To tell truth, their guards behaved like gentlemen, nor indulged in any unseemly demonstrations of triumph over a fallen foe.

Now and then the burghers raised their voices in song, as some pious elder began

to chant to an old-world tune one of the Psalms of David. "Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations," they sang, with the firm conviction that they were the chosen and elect of Jehovah. And thus they covered the weary miles, herding their prisoners like a flock of sheep.

But there was one prisoner who did not intend to be lodged in a gaol at Winburg, nor had he any ambition to see Pretoria just yet. He willed, rather, to be back in Bloemfontein, ready to get even with his brother Boer some day. And with that man to will was to do.

When Burnham, the scout, was captured, he had been closely interrogated by Christian De Wet. Who was he? Why, an Englishman. What was he doing there without any uniform? Oh! he had been sent to draw a map of the country. And Burnham was not a man who looked either very intelligent or very important—when he liked. So Christian De Wet allowed himself to be deceived into the belief that he had captured some mere clerk; and thus it came to pass that the scout was herded in with the rest. Had the Free State commandant become possessed of the slightest suspicion that he held the person of the most dangerous man in Lord Roberts's army, he would have set a guard of a dozen men over him, with orders to keep him safe at the peril of their lives.

When the bullets began to hum in the spruit, Burnham was observed to tie his handkerchief round his leg. The rag was red, so that blood would not show on it. He also sat down. And when the prisoners were removed he limped. Once more the Boers were out-slimmed. Here was a man who could not march. "Here, you Englishman, get into this cart." Burnham chuckled, but it was strictly to himself. The guards believed him lame. They would, therefore, be inclined to suppose that he could not escape.

At first the scout was accommodated with a seat in the cart of a field-cornet, along with the captured officers; but Burnham did not wish to get the field-cornet into trouble if he should escape, so he suggested to the officers that they should object to the presence of a "d—— civilian quill-driver" in the same vehicle as their loftinesses. The officers obliged him, and cursed so freely at the impudence of the Boers in placing a quill-driver on an equality with them that the field-cornet ordered Burnham out of the cart. The scout protested feebly—he was wounded—he couldn't walk—he would complain to Lord Roberts. The officers d——d his impudence. And the field-cornet, wondering at the exceeding hardness of heart of these English aristocrats, found him a place in a more plebeian waggon.

But in the course of the day something aroused the suspicions of the good field-cornet. He called to him a native Bushman, and appointed him Burnham's special and peculiar guardian. And truly the black man was vigilant. No dodge, no device could induce him to relax his watch. And so the plunder and the prisoners marched till nightfall, and then laagered up. Next day (Sunday, April 1st) the march was resumed, and at night the laager was again formed.

The scout slept not a wink, no matter who else did. Waiting until he thought two of the guards were asleep, he rolled under a waggon, pushed his rolled-up blanket before him, and tried to roll between the two drowsy ones. He did slip through, to his great joy, only to crawl

into another and more wakeful line of sentries. Burnham saw that the game was up, for that night at least ; and with infinite pains he crawled back again to his own place.

The laager was broken up soon after midnight, and the trek resumed. The wily scout manœuvred himself into the front seat of the rear waggon. The watchful Bushman stuck to him like a leech. Slowly the waggons lumbered on. Day began to peep, and as the sun rose so hope began to die in Burnham's breast, when, by a special dispensation of grace, the Kaffir drivers began to swear —something had gone wrong with the harness of the oxen. The waggon stuck. The Bushman watchdog went forward to bear a hand, for no black African can ever resist the temptation to assist in ravelling still worse the ravelled harness of an ox-team.

Down dropped Burnham ; and ere the Bushman had reached the heads of the foremost oxen the scout had run a hundred yards. The light was none too good, even then ; and in a minute Burnham was out of sight of his captors. A kopje ! Just the place to hide in. And towards the kopje the fugitive directed his steps. He gained it ere long, just about the moment when the Bushman returned from his labour of love to find his charge vanished. That Bushman's skin was not a very enviable tenement for human bones when the field-cornet discovered the truth.

At the foot of the kopje was a farmhouse, towards which Burnham cautiously approached. He found it to be a Dutch home, and prudently refrained from knocking at the door. Instead, he hunted for a hiding place, and presently found an open drain, like a deep furrow or ditch cut in the earth. He found that if he lay flat down on his stomach in this trench his back would be level with the top. The earth was brown : Burnham's clothes were brown. He stretched himself in the furrow with the confidence born of knowledge—knowledge that so long as he did not move he was practically invisible.

But the trouble was to remain motionless. The Boer convoy halted hard by, and the burghers came in numbers to the farmhouse, craving its hospitality. In the course of their journeys to and fro they

THE PRESIDENCY, BLOEMFONTEIN.

passed within a few feet of the fugitive, but he kept himself rigid, and they did not see him. When the convoy had passed on, the people of the farm took it into their heads to stroll about ; and they almost trod on the man in the drain. But neither did they see him.

Night fell at last, and Burnham rose—not with much agility, for his limbs were stiff and cramped with lying motionless for a whole day. He had no compass ; but that was a small matter to this man. He struck a bee-line from Bloemfontein ; and as the blood returned to his limbs he hurried on in the night. When daylight came he had to move more cautiously. Only one Boer did he encounter, and that one was unarmed. As for food, his whole stock consisted of one biscuit. He saw plenty of farmhouses—some of them, as he moved nearer to Bloemfontein, flew the white flag. But Burnham, though daring enough, ran no unnecessary risks, and he did not seek the shelter of any of the farms.

Tuesday night, the second of his wanderings, found him faint and weary, but undaunted. He ought not to be far away from Roberts's camp now ; so he braced himself for an effort, pulled his belt in a hole or two, and hurried forward. In the early hours of Wednesday morning he saw white tents ahead, and the welcome voice of a sentry challenged, "Who goes there?"

"Friend!" said Burnham.

And the camp welcomed him as one risen from the dead. "When we heard you had been taken, we were not in the least alarmed," the scout's friends said. "We knew they could not keep you long." So Burnham came back from his map-making : came back to be a thorn in the side of the Dutchman for many a long day.

But it was not Burnham who was the hero of the Koorn Spruit affair. The heroes of that bloody day were the men of Q Battery R.H.A. After the fight was over, and the four guns, remaining until the last moment defiantly spitting death at the foe, limbered up and drove through the ranks of the cavalry and mounted infantry, regulars and Colonials alike stood in their stirrups and cheered. It was the homage of brave men to heroes.

For once "Bobs" was in a difficulty. He wanted to recommend someone for the Victoria Cross—someone whose conduct had been conspicuously gallant—some one whose daring was outstanding above the daring of his comrades. But it was impossible, and the more "Bobs" inquired the more impossible did it appear to award the palm to this man or that.

Finally, he "formed the opinion that the conduct of all ranks of Q Battery Royal Horse Artillery was conspicuously gallant and daring, but that all were equally brave and devoted in their behaviour. He therefore decided to treat the case of the battery as one of collective gallantry. . . ." Which meant that he could select any one or more, by seniority or otherwise, for the distinction.

But "Bobs" knew a thing or two. He could not award the Cross himself, and he was determined not to leave it to mere chance. He would allow the men themselves to select the recipients of the honour. So he directed that one officer should be selected by the officers, one non-commissioned officer by the non-commissioned officers, and two gunners or drivers by the gunners and drivers.

A difficulty arose as to the officers. There were only two (Hornby and Humphrys) unwounded and able to assist in saving the guns. Each modestly declined

the honour and voted for the other. As there could be no majority in such circumstances, the field-marshal had to decide between the two obstinate fellows; and he decided in favour of Major Hornby as the senior. The non-coms. chose Sergeant Charles Parker, and the gunners and drivers selected Gunner Isaac Lodge and Driver Horace Harry Glasock as their representative heroes. Only these four received the bit of gun-metal. But all deserved it.

The horse gunners carried off the honours to such an extent that all other exploits on the British side were dwarfed by comparison. Yet there were many instances of individual prowess such as men love to dwell upon. There was the heroic conduct of Lieutenant Maxwell, of Roberts's Horse. A man of his troop had his horse shot in the mad rush from the drift. The horse rolled over, pinning the trooper to the earth. The enemy was only 100 yards away, and the rifles cracked incessantly; but Maxwell reined up, dismounted, extricated the fallen trooper, and carried him off the field.

Colonel Pilcher in like manner saved a wounded corporal of the Household Cavalry, bringing him out from under the muzzles of the Mausers. So, also, Vandeleur, of the Essex Regiment's mounted infantry, rode back under fire for a comrade. And one Todd, an American who had 'listed in Roberts's Horse, galloped out to a donga, braving a perfect fusillade, and brought in a wounded man. Todd also wrought hard to save the guns.

Nor were there wanting incidents of combat unusual in modern warfare. "Surrender," said a Boer to a burly Life Guardsman, one of the gun escort who had ridden innocently into the spruit. "Throw down your gun!" The Guardsman did. He threw his carbine full at the Dutchman's head, was lucky enough to hit him; and then, dashing in the spur, he escaped. A sergeant of the A.S.C., also in the spruit, was taken charge of by a big Boer. As the shrapnel of Q Battery began to burst, Boer and Briton took cover under a waggon. "Hot work, this," remarked the Dutchman. "Very!" the sergeant replied. And, seizing his foeman by the throat, he battered out his brains on the wheel of the waggon. The sergeant got clean away.

One of the regular mounted infantry, having had his horse shot close up to the spruit, was stalked by three Boers, who thought they were approaching unperceived on Mr. Atkins, who was lying in some broken ground. In point of fact, the said Mr. Atkins saw them quite well; and when they jumped on him all at once and shouted "Surrender," he dropped one with his rifle, and thrust a hole through the second with his bayonet. The third drew trigger on him, but missed, and, not relishing the steel, closed. The Essex man—for to the Essex Regiment the soldier belonged—got one hand free, clutched the Boer by the throat, and quietly choked him.

Our pride of heart is chastened when we reflect that in the day of Koorn Spruit that courage and coolness were merely exerted to avert total destruction. And such destruction had become more than a possibility owing to the insane neglect of the simplest precautions. Nor was it surprising that when the British people heard of the disaster to Broadwood's column many bitterly asked, "Is not somebody going to be hanged for this?"

It is hard to have to spend your blood and treasure. It is heartbreaking to have them wasted by fools.

CHAPTER LXXII.

THE DEATH OF JOUBERT: ACTION AT KAREE SIDING.

ON the 27th of March the Boers sustained a loss, perhaps the most serious of any they had met with up to that time. For on that day, Piet Joubert, the commander-in-chief of the Transvaal, died.

Sir George White, who had felt the prowess of the dead general, described him as "a soldier and a gentleman, a brave and honourable opponent." Joubert was undoubtedly the finest tactician in the two Republics, which contained more than one civilian warrior of no mean capacity.

A lawyer by profession, Joubert was a general by nature. He had a curious knack, always to be found in those who have great success in the command of armies, not only of planning his own moves, but also of forecasting what move his opponent would make in reply. He was born a British subject in Cape Colony in the year 1831, but emigrated across the Vaal at an early age, and from the time he was thirty he took an active part in the life of the Transvaal Republic. He was to the army of the Dutchmen what Kruger was to the civilian Boer, and the old burghers had blind faith in his military capacity. He planned the campaign which resulted in the disaster of Majuba, the slaughter of the 94th at Bronkhurst Spruit, and the capture of Potchefstroom. He laid his plans carefully, and carried them out with the utmost secrecy and skill, isolating almost at the same moment all the tiny British garrisons in the Transvaal. Indeed, there is no doubt that it was to Piet Joubert that the Boers owed the re-establishment of the South African Republic.

Nevertheless, he was friendly to England and to Englishmen. He accompanied Kruger to England in 1878, and saw something of the might and resources of the British nation. He also saw that Great Britain could, if she had chosen to exert herself, have conquered the rebellious Republic by sheer weight of numbers, and he never failed to proclaim to his countrymen that in retroceding to the Boers the country between the Vaal and the Limpopo, the Queen's Government had done a magnanimous act.

As a rule, the Army is in favour of war—a rule which holds good in all countries. But the Boer commandant-general had not been in favour of the proclamation of war between the Republics and the British Empire. He had opposed the opening of hostilities so forcibly as to bring upon himself, at the mouth of some of the young and foolish burghers, the reproach of being a traitor. But when war did break out and the sword became the arbiter of his country's destinies, Joubert threw himself into the conflict with an energy wonderful for a man of his advanced years. He it was who planned the invasion of the north corner of Natal, and it is a matter of history how successful that invasion was, and how nearly it brought about the temporary ousting of British government from that colony. Nor must it be forgotten, in estimating the success of the

great Dutch general, that he had a very difficult task to perform in leading an army of free and independent burghers without the discipline and the blind obedience of the trained battalions of Europe.

In an army where the privates deem themselves every whit as good as the officers, and take to themselves the liberty of openly discussing the wisdom of the orders issued to them, the only man who can lead is the man in whom the soldiers have implicit confidence. And it was well for Piet Joubert that he, by his past services for his country and his past exploits, was able to command that confidence. He had, moreover, considerable gifts of oratory and could persuade the burghers to do many things which they would not have done without the influence of his tactful tongue. Unlike his friend and rival, Kruger, who blurted out in the fewest possible words exactly what he meant, Joubert always spoke diplomatically. He knew how to approach his object without committing himself, and in addition to being the ablest soldier of the Transvaal, he was its finest diplomatist.

No sketch, however slight, of the life and character of this man would be complete without reference to his undoubted chivalry and courtesy. He owed it, no doubt, largely to his French descent.

When war was on the point of breaking out, he cabled a passionate appeal for peace to Queen Victoria. We have reason to believe that her Majesty was profoundly moved by the document. When the unfortunate Penn Symons died, a prisoner in his hands, the commandant-general telegraphed a message of sympathy to Lady Penn Symons, and caused the Englishman to be buried with all honour and respect. No one ever imagined that the dastardly white flag tricks, perpetrated by some of the men whom he had the misfortune to command, ever received the approval of Piet Joubert. And when he died, the Queen showed, as she always did show, her sympathy with sorrow and her appreciation of high character by sending a womanly message of sympathy to Mrs. Joubert. He died respected by his opponents and mourned by his countrymen ; nor can there be a doubt that his death at this particular juncture was a blow from which the Boers never recovered. They had amongst them three or four men who could handle a commando in the field, but they had not now a single head to plan a great campaign.

While Joubert was lying on his deathbed, Lord Roberts was active at Bloemfontein. He had cleared his communications with the south, and now set to work to push back numbers of the enemy who menaced his outposts on the north. General Broadwood was left in command of the cavalry at Thaba N'chu, and French returned to Bloemfontein.

The most northerly of the British outposts was at Glen, where the railway crosses the Modder River, and two battalions of the Guards were holding the post, while Engineers, both regular and volunteer, repaired the railway bridge, which the enemy had damaged when they retired from Bloemfontein.

North of Glen, the next station was Karee Siding, about four miles further along the line. The station took its name from three parallel ridges of small hills, surrounded by kopjes known as Karee, and on the 26th of March a British patrol reported that the enemy had occupied these hills in force.

They might have continued to occupy them for a long time, as far as the military situation was concerned ; but political

considerations rendered it necessary for them to be dispersed and driven off. For the Johannesburg Zarps constituted a considerable portion of the commando ; and these men patrolled the country daily and nightly, engaged upon the mission of chastising the Free Staters who had made submission to the British and handed in their arms. Some they arrested and carried to Kroonstad ; and where they could not lay hands on the man they wanted, they usually contrived to carry away or damage his property. Of course, Lord Roberts had to put a stop to this. It did not consort with his honour, and the honour of the British nation, that men who had put themselves under the protection of the flag should be harried in this manner.

GENERAL JOUBERT, OFFICER AND GENTLEMAN.

Accordingly, on the 27th of March, an infantry division and a brigade of cavalry, with three batteries of artillery, set out from Bloemfontein to Glen. The mounted infantry of the 7th Division was already in that camp, and on the 28th General French came up with the 2nd

Cavalry Brigade. The force now consisted of General Chermside's brigade, comprising the Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Hampshire, and Scottish Border regiments; General Wavell's brigade, comprising the Cheshire, East Lancashire, North Staffordshire, and South Wales Border regiments; the mounted infantry, under Colonel Le Gallais; and the 2nd and 3rd Cavalry Brigades, under General French. The artillery comprised the 75th, 62nd, and 18th batteries of field artillery, and three new guns of 37 millimetres diameter, which went with Colonel Le Gallais.

The enemy's position may roughly be described as a valley almost surrounded by kopje-crowned hills, which ran in parallel ridges. The ridges stood up out of a vast expanse of open veldt, a country not unfavourable for cavalry. The British plan of campaign was for French, with this cavalry, to make a detour round the enemy's right. Le Gallais, with his mounted infantry, was to make a similar movement, to get round the enemy's left. When these enveloping movements should be well in progress, the infantry would be launched straight at the Boer position in front.

On the morning of the 29th of March General French and Colonel Le Gallais were early afoot. They had to wait until it was daylight before setting out, because the ground was only partially reconnoitred. And it was exceedingly dangerous to move over unknown country in this part of the world. You might imagine you were on a plain which stretched in unbroken flatness for miles, and all the time there would be in that plain huge dongas capable of concealing hundreds of men. In fact, this country, seemingly flat, was the very place for ambushes.

French made what haste he could in his detour to the west, and before the clock struck ten a message flashed to the heliograph station at Glen, saying that the cavalry were so far advanced as to be able to command the plain in rear of the Karee Hills. Tucker promptly put his infantry in motion.

The division had to advance across about four miles of rolling veldt, slightly up hill all the way. Tucker took the men across these four miles, a battalion at a time, in echelon from the right. In front of him he threw out one regiment, in widely extended order, to act as a screen of skirmishers, and of this screen the flanks were protected by the C.I.V. mounted infantry.

As we have said before, the Karee Hills consisted of three parallel lines. And to the first of these parallel lines the army advanced cautiously. Rather to their own surprise, the cloud of skirmishers met with no opposition, and the C.I.V.'s dismounted, and, putting their horses in safety, crawled cautiously up the slope. The C.I.V. mounted infantry was of excellent quality, and about as different from the mounted infantry of the regular army as cheese is different from chalk. The mounted infantrymen of the regular army is formed by taking from regiments of Foot the required number of good shots, and putting them on horseback. This is never done except in time of war, in order, one supposes, that the men who have to become mounted infantry may not be encumbered with any previous knowledge or training. If the mounted infantryman can ride, so much the better. As a rule, he hardly knows a horse's head from its hoofs. As for knowledge of the way to treat a horse, how in the world could he have that? He knows no more about scouting on horseback than he knows about his horse, his usual method being to ride straight up to

top of some eminence and take a look round. Thus he offers to an enemy an excellent view and a first-rate target.

The C.I.V. mounted infantry, however, consisted of men who could ride before they joined the corps—many of them men who had hunted since they were boys. And there were amongst them a few volunteers who had for a long time studied the tactics proper to mounted infantry. Besides this, the C.I.V.'s were intelligent, coming as they did mostly from the educated classes, and there had not been time for the drill sergeant to make them mere machines. Lord Roberts speedily found out the value of a regiment in which there was a brain behind every rifle

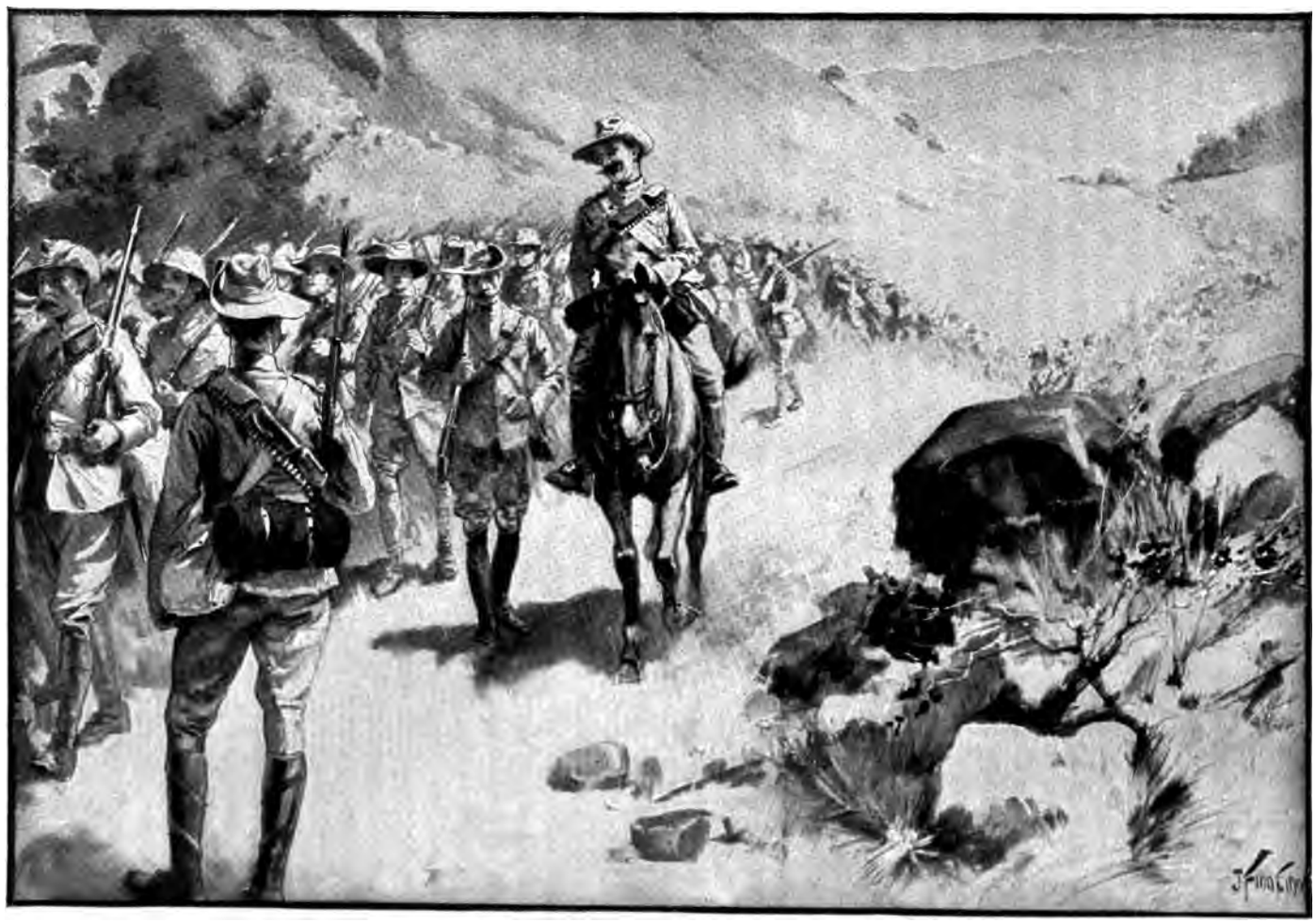
Just now the C.I.V.'s were practising the art of making themselves invisible while on the move. The dismounted and mounted infantry crept up the ridge in such skilful style that the Lincolnshire Regiment below could only occasionally catch the flutter of a khaki slouch hat. To their great disappointment the citizen soldiers found no enemy on the first ridge. They at once reported and pushed on towards the second, while the rest of the infantry division advanced in confidence and security across the open.

So also the mounted infantry scouted towards the second ridge, and again found no enemy. Once more they reported and pushed on towards the third ridge. The enemy was strangely silent, so silent that the British began to think that he was not there at all. Carefully and steadily the C.I.V.'s pushed on right to the very foot of the last ridge. No rifle spoke, no shell burst, and the mounted infantry scoured the brushwood at the foot of the kopje without finding a trace of an enemy. Again they reported that there was no enemy up to the foot of the third ridge.

The Lincolnshire and Norfolk Regiments had been pushed across to the right of the Boer position, and had seized a kopje whence they could command the final ridge. The Hampshire Regiment and part of the Scottish Borderers pushed straight on, two companies of the Borderers leading. They advanced steadily in open order across the veldt, and had arrived quite close to the ridge before the enemy fired a shot. Then, from no more than 200 yards away, a fire blazed out, heavy and accurate. The bullets whistled round the ears of the Scottish Borderers, and played a tune such as almost unnerved them ; and, as usual, not a single Boer was to be seen. Back fell the two companies of the King's Own, in some confusion—back for another 200 yards, until they found a spruit, where they could take shelter, and in which they could find cover for musketry.

The three batteries of field artillery had been prowling about the whole morning, seeking what they might devour. Now was a chance for them. The battery dashed up, and came to the assistance of the Scottish Borderers, and within five minutes of the Boers opening fire, shrapnel was shrieking and spattering the slope of the ridge with showers of bullets.

The fire now began to get hotter and hotter, a matter which somewhat amazed the British infantry at the time, for it seemed as though the defenders of the ridge increased every moment. The explanation was simple, and was also a good example of the advantages of mobility. It appeared that early in the morning the Boers had seen Le Gallais's mounted infantry threatening their left, and, not knowing that this was part of a general attack, had gone out with their main body to checkmate the British mounted



C.I.V.'S. ON THE MARCH.

infantry. On discovering that Tucker was attacking in front with a whole division of foot soldiers, the Boers left merely a thin line to hold back Le Gallais, while the main body returned to the Karee hills to dispute with Tucker.

It was about twenty minutes past two in the afternoon when the leading companies of the Scottish Borderers came under fire. At 2.25 a British field battery was in action, and at 2.30 the enemy also brought artillery to bear.

Let us now turn to the Boer left, where Colonel Le Gallais was operating with his mounted infantry brigade and his pom-poms. This brigade was first in touch with the enemy, and had been fighting for about two hours and a half before Tucker's infantry came upon the scene. The Australian Mounted Infantry and Nesbitt's Horse, a corps raised in Grahamstown, did excellent work.

After making a wide sweep, so as to keep well out of sight, Le Gallais brought himself upon the left rear of the enemy, opposite to a range of kopjes marking the extreme left of their position. Dismounting, the Australians and Nesbitt's Horse crawled ahead in a swarm, leaving no foot of ground unsearched, what time the bulk of the brigades huddled out of sight behind a rise in the ground.

Judiciously feeling their way, as carefully as a surgeon probes for a bullet, the Australians finally found the Boer left. The outposts of Commandant Grobler were posted upon some of the ridges and kopjes before mentioned; and the Colonials saw them before being seen. Then came a pretty piece of stalking. If you have ever had the luck to see a clever hunter stalking some quick-eared, quick-sighted beast of the forest, you have seen something very like the Australians and Nesbitt's Horse on that day. Just as the hunter crawls and creeps, taking heed to keep silence lest he should give the alarm to his wished-for prey, so the keen Colonials crept and crawled noiselessly upon the Dutch pickets.

But the Dutchmen had keen sight. One of them caught a glimpse of something moving in the bushes below; and in an instant he shouted a warning and fired his rifle. But the Colonials were close up by this time. A whistle blew shrilly; and at the sound the air was rent by the cracking of ten score rifles. Then the Colonials hurried forward, rushing and firing, reloading as they rushed again. For a few minutes the Dutchmen held their own; and then, as the Colonials fired one last crashing volley at close quarters and sprang up to close with the foe, the Boers fled to their main body.

Le Gallais now made a cast to get round to the enemy's rear—into the plain reported by scouts and marked "Plain" on the maps. It was a plain; but a plain cut up by dongas and ravines and gullies to such an extent as to make it almost impossible for mounted troops. Moreover, every donga, every spruit, every ravine held Boers, who took full advantage of the entrenchments which Nature had made ready to hand. Still the Colonials held on with terrier-like persistence. From donga to donga, from ravine to ravine they hunted the reluctant enemy by sheer straight shooting and dogged perseverance. And at last, before two o'clock, they had cleared out every man of them and driven them in on the main position.

From far away to the west came faint roaring sounds. It was the horse artillery clearing a road for French. That general had signalled at ten o'clock that he was in a position whence he could attack the

Boer right rear ; and so he thought at the time. In point of fact, however, this was far from being the case. The ground he had to traverse was, if anything, more split up, more cleft by dongas and ravines than was the ground on the other flank.

Try as he would, the Silent Cavalryman could find no opening for a move inwards upon the enemy's rear. And as he marched there came from all sides, from scrub-covered holes in the ground, bullets that struck horses—and men too, sometimes. The horse artillery did wonders. The guns bump-bumped, rattle-rattled over the rough ground. "Unlimber! Load! Fire! Let 'em have it again. And again." And the screeching shells burst over the thick bushes. "That seems to have quieted them. Limber up!" And away go the bold horse gunners to repeat the performance.

As the cavalry marched on, the half-starved horses stumbling over stones and bushes, the ground became more and more difficult. The enemy seemed thicker, too. From the front and both flanks the Mauser bullets flew. In vain the horse gunners showered shrapnel among the bushes. "We must try a charge," quoth General French.

As the word was passed round the ranks, "Prepare to charge," the faces of the horsemen lighted up with joy. For several hours they had been peppered ; now they would have some of their own back. And with unholy glee they clutched their lances. More by token, they knew full well the Boers hated the pointed sticks—had hated them ever since that gloaming at Elandslaagte when the Royal Irish rode through and through their flying commandoes.

They settled themselves in the saddle and swung their jaded chargers into line. "Now, trumpeter, blow—blow your lustiest." The stirring note rings out. It is echoed and re-echoed down the lines as trumpeter after trumpeter repeats the brazen command. And like a solid wall, bristling with lance-points, two brigades of British cavalry hurl themselves, man and horse, at the foe. Tired horses stumble, but fierce riders pick them up and throw them forward.

"Almighty! They come! The men with the pointed sticks! Shoot! Run! They are on us! Mount and ride—down this donga—up this ravine—anywhere so that the devils with sharp sticks cannot follow."

So the Dutchmen bolt, as a rabbit bolts when he sees a terrier. Back to their main position they run—the main position on Karree Kloof, where there are entrenchments, and no cavalry can follow. And French, rid of this annoyance, pushes on a little north, looking for the level ground that he can use for his turning movement.

It is just about this time, when the Silent Cavalryman is clearing the ground on the right, and Le Gallais the ground on the left of the Karee ridges, that Tucker's infantry comes into action.

For a good hour and a half the British have none too much the best of the fighting. The Zarps,* who compose a considerable section of Grobler's 4,000 men, are first-class fighting men, and no one can teach them very much about the practical part of war. The two leading companies of Tucker's frontal attack suffered severely when the enemy caught them within 200 yards. Chermside's brigade has clearly got more to do than it can handle.

"Here, galloper! To Wavell: quick!

* *Zarp* is Z.A.R.P., the initial letters of Zuid Afrikander Republiek Police.

Tell him to touch in with his right to support Chermside's left."

Up come the stalwarts of Wavell's brigade, the Cheshires, the North Staffordshires, and the 24th, closing in to reinforce the firing line. The East Lancashires had another little job in hand—the storming of a big hill on the east of the third ridge. This hill was of the shape of a sugar-loaf, except that it had a flat top.

THE COLONIALS CAUGHT IN A HAILSTORM.

To it they went, the lion-hearted lads of Lancashire facing the steepness of the hillside, clambering on and up in face of a very hurricane of lead. It was slow work. The hill could, no doubt, have been captured by the simple process of walking the battalion up until within distance for a charge with the bayonet. They would have gone without a murmur—nay, gladly. And the survivors, even if there had been no more than fifty of them, would have cleared the position. But this form of attack had gone out of favour since "Bobs" took command. The Little Man had a habit of referring to exploits of that kind as "throwing men's lives away." For he had some regard for the life of the private soldier, and some contempt for the officers who tried to carry out in the days of the magazine rifle tactics only suitable for the times of Brown Bess.

Wherefore, when the firing grew hot and heavy, the East Lancashires found cover, and tried what musketry could do. A battery of field artillery ought to have been there to cover the attack, and to

mitigate the fierceness of the Boer fire. The reason why the battery was not there was because the officer in charge of it tried to drag his guns into position up the steep side of a ravine, with results disastrous; and that battery never fired another shot all day.

Leaving the East Lancashire lads on the side of the sugarloaf hill, showing off their marksmanship, let us return to the rest of the attack, noting that at this time (3 p.m.) French was pushing north; Le Gallais was struggling over broken ground, trying to turn inwards on the opposite flank; the Lincolnshire, Norfolk, and five companies of the Scottish Borderers had taken a hill at the end of the third ridge of kopjes, opposite to the end where the East Lancashires were attacking; the Hampshires and South Wales Borderers had come up in touch with the Lincolnshires; the Cheshires and Staffordshires were moving off to support the East Lancashires; two companies of the Scottish Borderers were lying down in a donga 400 yards in front of the Boer position on the ridge; and the C.I.V.'s were close up to them.

The turning movements of French and Le Gallais had not been quite the success which had been anticipated, and it became necessary for General Tucker to attack along the line if he wished to accomplish anything of importance that day. The two companies of Scottish Borderers in the donga were led by Captain Sellar, and when the order came for an attack in line on the ridge, they did splendid work. Beautifully led by Sellar, they issued from one end of the donga, and charged the enemy almost end on. They were but few, yet their dash made up for a great deal.

By dint of alternately rushing and volleying, the two companies chased along the lower slopes, driving them from cover to cover until at last the Dutchmen were driven completely out of their advanced positions, and compelled them to take refuge in the main entrenchments. It was a brilliant piece of work, carried out in a style befitting a regiment of such historic name as the King's Own Scottish Borderers.

There was no bayonet work, except once for about five minutes, when a section of the Borderers, charging to clear a piece of scrub, came across a dozen or so marksmen who had been unable or unwilling to retire with the rest. "Knives!" burst from every throat, and, with the word, bayonets were fixed. This was a luxury long denied to the Scottish Borderers, who had, for the most part, never seen a Boer foeman. The bright steel was dulled instantly, all except in the case of one man who fenced with a burly farmer. The farmer swung his rifle by the barrel, dealing heavy blows. The canny Scot dodged the butt end, and every now and then feigned to thrust. Seeing him so long over the business, a comrade came to his rescue. "Leave me alone," said the fencer; "if you want a Boer, go and catch one for yersel." It appeared that the Borderer was making the most of his treat, and was playing with his prize as a cat plays with a mouse.

The whole of the infantry now moved forward to push home the attack. The Cheshires had moved forward into line with the East Lancashire Regiment, having the Staffordshire Regiment in reserve. On the other side the Norfolk Regiment, the Hampshire Regiment, and the Lincolns, with the South Wales Borderers in reserve, flung themselves at the ridge.

The Boers defended their position with obstinate valour. Man after man dropped, victims to the Mausers. For some reason

or other the enemy's fire was not particularly accurate. Either he had not got the range, or he was nervous, or there was some other reason. But the fact remained that his shooting was just about as bad as it could be. The worst loss sustained by the attacking brigades was caused by two Boer field guns, which were worked in first-rate style. One shell alone blew up five Scottish Borderers.

With the Norfolk Regiment leading, Chermside threw his men at the Boer right, and he was strongly supported by the mounted infantry, who, having dismounted, held the flank. For about an hour the English regiments, with the South Wales Borderers following, crept up the hill, while the Cheshires and the East Lancashire Regiment crept up the face of the conical mountain. Until four o'clock the infantry advanced, but at about that hour the Dutchmen seemed to recover,

HIS FIRST AND LAST SHOT AT THE BOERS.
A WOUNDED LANCASHIRE HELD UP BY HIS COMRADES FOR "JUST ONE SHOT."

and poured in so hot and accurate a fire that the British could advance not another foot. For half an hour matters were at a deadlock. The 18th Battery of the Field Artillery had somehow got into position, and was shelling the two Boer field guns, and some of the New South Wales Mounted Infantry, under Colonel Knight, were sent to make another attempt to get round the Boer right. Just as they were pressing their attack with some appearance of success, the sound of cannon was heard to the north. It was General French, who had at last discovered ground over which he could move, and was making his encircling movement.

Hastily dismantling their guns, the Dutchmen placed them in horse-drawn waggons, and themselves mounted the ponies which had been kept standing ready during the greater part of the day. They left a rear-guard to dispute the last ridge with Tucker's infantry, so as to give the main body time to retreat.

These movements were made behind the shelter of the ridge, but as soon as the force in front felt the fire slackening, they pressed forward to the assault. In a short time the Norfolks had carried the ridge in front of them. A few minutes later the Cheshires and the East Lancashires were on the top of the conical mountain—only from this eminence to see the Boer army a mile away, hastening towards Brandfort. The Boer rear-guard was not so far away, and into it the British infantry let fly volley after volley.

Now was the time for French and his two brigades of mounted troops to fall upon the Boers and utterly destroy them. Now also was the time for pom-pom and horse battery to hurl death and destruction into the Boer column. But French could hardly move, so difficult was the ground and so used up were his horses. And as for shell fire, nobody seems to have thought of it. At all events, the Dutchmen were allowed to get away, scot free, without the loss of a single gun or waggon.

Away they went to Brandfort, fifteen miles to the north, and they could boast that of the day's fighting they had not had so very much the worst. True, they had been driven out of their position, and must, therefore, be considered defeated. On the other hand, they had inflicted loss considerably greater than they had sustained; they had retreated orderly and under arms, abandoning nothing. And the British, though they had driven the enemy out of a position of some strength, could not be said to have succeeded altogether. The enveloping movements had failed utterly. The difficult ground had been altogether too much for the mounted troops, and the British infantry had been held at bay for an appreciable time.

It was certain, however, that the enemy had retired, and that now he was nowhere in force within thirty miles of Bloemfontein to the north. Whether the result attained was commensurate with the losses, was quite arguable. About 160 men were killed and wounded and missing, and in exchange the British generals had very little to show. It became quite clear that the maps in the possession of the Intelligence Department were not very reliable, and, further, that in such a curious country as this, where the ground was liable to be split up by huge natural trenches, scouting of the most careful kind would have to be undertaken.

On the whole, the battle of Karee Siding could not be said to have shed lustre on the British arms; but there was something to come, compared with which this battle was a very Waterloo.

CHAPTER LXXIII

A LOST REPUTATION—REDDERSBURG.

WHILE Clements was clearing up the south-western Free State, and French was exercising his troopers on the road to Thaba N'chu, the indefatigable Gatacre was lying with his division at Springfontein.

The 3rd Infantry Division was now a division in something more than name. When he was at Sterkstroom, Gatacre had been expected to do the work of a division with one and a half battalions of infantry and some Colonial Horse. Now, for the first time, he had his full complement of troops.

He had, however, lost some men whose services he would have been glad enough to retain. Those men were the detachment of Cape Police, who had been with him from the dark days of Stormberg right along to the glorious occasion when they helped to save Bethulie bridge. Now the Cape Police were not, properly speaking, troops at all. They were the guardians of the law and the preservers of order in Cape Colony, and when the time came for Gatacre's division to cross into foreign territory, the police, to their huge disappointment, were not permitted to accompany the force. They were not servants of the Imperial Government, but of the Government of Cape Colony, so there was no possible way for the general to take them with him. Accordingly, he paraded them for the last time, thanked them for the valour they had shown, and the services they had rendered, and bade them adieu.

By the 18th of March, General Gatacre was installed with his whole army in the town of Springfontein. He soon had a visit from Kitchener, who ordered the camp to be shifted outside the town, and there the 3rd Division remained many days.

The first work to be done was to put the line to the south in working order. We have previously told how the Boers blew up the railway bridge at Bethulie. We have also recorded how the waggon bridge at the same place was saved from destruction by the gallantry of Lieutenant Popham and a handful of the Sherwood Foresters, and by the cool courage of Captain Grant, a sapper. Now the waggon bridge was not far away from the railway bridge—a little to the west. It occurred to the Royal Engineers that, as the reconstruction of the railway bridge would be the work of many weeks, the best thing to do would be to divert the railway traffic and carry it across the river by the waggon bridge. But the waggon bridge was too weak to stand the passage of a train, so the sappers hit on this plan: They laid a line of rail down to the waggon bridge, over it, and continued it on the north bank to the ordinary line; then they took all the transport trains down to the bridge, detached the engine, split the train up into single trucks, and hauled those trucks over, one at a time, by means of a rope attached to an engine on the other side of the bridge. Thus, no engine ever ran over the unstable waggon bridge.

Once on the north bank, the trucks were coupled together again, and another engine took them off to Bloemfontein.

The line over Norval's Pont was the direct route from Cape Town to Bloemfontein, but the blowing up of the bridge there had rendered it impossible for traffic. All transport, therefore, had to be sent along from Rosmead Junction to Stormberg, so as to put it on Gatacre's line; and on a single track railway this involved great labour and endless delay.

NORVAL'S PONT DESTROYED BY THE BOERS.

Gatacre's first trouble was with the natives. Of these there was an enormous number attached to the Army. A few of them were employed as scouts, more as drivers, and yet another large number as servants—assistants to the Army Service Corps; and while the railway traffic at the river was in the state in which it was, great numbers of these men were employed by the Engineers. As soon as these Kaffirs found themselves in the Free State, with the Boers very much at their mercy, they began to loot and plunder, after the manner of their kind. Remonstrance had not the slightest effect; indeed, one imagines that the untutored black looked upon the Englishman as a kind of lunatic, who had not the wit to take what a benevolent Providence had most clearly placed within his reach. They had seen how the Boers had plundered, under the name of commandeering, the property of loyal colonists in the north of Cape Colony, and they had imagined that as soon as the British began to drive the enemy back, and to invade his country, there would be something in the nature of reprisals. They, at any rate, who did not love the Boers at the best of times, were disposed to take full advantage of their position, as persons attached to a conquering party passing through a hostile country; and if Gatacre

had not interfered with a strong hand, not a Boer for the space of thirty miles around Springfontein would have had a single portable article to bless himself with. A few examples had to be made, and then the blacks ceased from troubling and the Boers were at rest.

Having restored railway communication, and reduced the blacks to order, Gatacre set to work to pacify the country to the east of the line. On the 2nd of April he sent out a column of nearly 600 men, to which was entrusted the task of occupying and taking the submissions of three places called Smithfield, Dewetsdorp and Reddersburg. Altogether, the pilgrimage to these places and the return journey to Springfontein would involve a march of about 100 miles.

The column consisted of three companies of the Royal Irish Rifles, with details (424 men altogether) and two companies of mounted infantry (167 officers and men). It was not believed that any opposition would be met with, as the nearest Boer force was reported to be somewhere in the neighbourhood of Wepener. So the column was to make a rapid march, and to that intent was to march light. They took no artillery, and even the reserve ammunition was cut down, so that there should be the least possible transport.

Smithfield and Dewetsdorp were successfully and peacefully occupied, and on the afternoon of the 2nd of April, the column started on the road to Reddersburg. They swung along cheerfully, never having any more sense of danger apparently than if they had been marching between London and Canterbury. And, the Irish Rifles being there, there was no lack of merriment. Some of the men even carried out the holiday-making appearance of the march to such an extent as to blow mightily on mouth organs, and music hall songs were not lacking. But while the Royal Irish were stepping out so jauntily along the road, covered by the mounted infantry, another body of men was also hurrying along towards Reddersburg, from the south-east. For Commandant De Wet, who had commanded the burghers and rebels opposed to Gatacre at Stormberg, was crowding on all sail to reach Reddersburg first. Friends had caused him to be acquainted with the fact that a small party of British soldiers, without artillery, was marching about the country, far away from its main body, and was marching on Reddersburg. De Wet determined to cut off these so-foolish Britishers. His men were becoming rather tired of being hustled all over the country by the grim troopers of General Brabant; and De Wet thought that if he could surprise and capture a few hundred *rooineks*, such an exploit would cause the waverers in his ranks to stiffen their backs and prolong the resistance to the British arms. For the Boers were fighting for time—why, will be explained hereafter.

Late in the day, when the British column was still about four miles from the town of Reddersburg, the mounted infantry scouts came in contact with the enemy. One or two men rode up to the muzzles of the Boer rifles, just in order to see how many muzzles there were. And the discharge of musketry that greeted them convinced the scouts that they were in the presence of a very considerable enemy.

It was getting dusk, and the British commander had no fancy for marching on in the dark when a commando was in the vicinity. He did not doubt that an ambush had been set for him, and he very wisely declined to walk into such a trap.

On the other hand, he could not bivouac then and there on the rolling veldt, where he had no protection, so he sent a few scouts and skirmishers up a hill hard by, the only one near. If the Boers were not already in possession of it he would occupy it himself. The hill was known as Mostert's Kop, a rocky eminence situate at the end of a ridge. Other hills surrounded it. It was not very high, and the ground around was cut up, as usual, by dongas and sluits. On Mostert's Kop, then, the Irish Rifles and the two companies of mounted infantry took their stand, wondering what morning would bring.

There was no firing that night, but when the morning broke the Irishmen saw a sight sufficient to daunt the bravest of them. The Dutchmen were all round them, and the sun was scarcely up before rifles began to crack from every donga and every sluit and from the other end of the ridge. Still, there was plenty of cover from musketry fire, even though that fire was coming from every side. But presently there burst over the top of the kopje a shrapnel shell ; then another and another and another. The Boers had three guns, and these were shelling the kopje from three sides at once; from this concentrated shell fire it was impossible to obtain protection, and in a very few minutes there was blood on the stones.

During the night a Kaffir had been sent with a message to Bethanie, the nearest place on the railway, and, therefore, the nearest British post, and some time in the afternoon of the 3rd this messenger made his way to the commander of the communications at Bethanie, with intelligence that a British force was being attacked at Reddersburg. Lord Roberts was at once informed of the state of affairs by telegraph, and he as promptly flashed a message down to Springfontein to General Gatacre, ordering him to go at once with his whole division to the rescue. Gatacre was to go up to Bethanie by rail, and from there to march across country and extricate his men.

There was just arrived from Egypt a battalion of the Cameron Highlanders. The Camerons had hardly reached Bloemfontein when they were packed into trains again and sent down to Bethanie. There they were to await the arrival of Gatacre, and act under his orders. Meanwhile the men on Mostert's Kop were in dire straits. They had piled up during the night stone breastworks, putting them together as best they could in the dark. But of scientific entrenchments they had none, and the protection afforded by the sangars did not avail much against the all-round fire of the Boer rifles and cannon. The only thing to be done was to lie low, showing as little as possible above the ground, and only rising to fire when it became absolutely necessary.

It is always difficult to teach Irishmen to be cautious, and the officers on this occasion were no more successful than other officers have been in times past in persuading their men to keep cover. But the first half-hour of the Boer fusillade convinced even the Royal Irish that if they did not wish to be shot down like rabbits, without a chance of retaliation, they must take cover more carefully.

Another unfortunate thing was that the men were compelled to husband their ammunition. Every man carried 150 rounds, and the ammunition waggons also contained about fifty rounds per man in addition. But what was this, if they were to stand even a day's siege? With no more than 200 rounds per man, volley firing

and even chance sniping shots became wasteful. Still, let it be said that when the Irishmen realised the critical nature of the occasion, they rose to meet it with a spirit and courage altogether undeniable. As for the mounted infantry, they were men of the 5th (Northumberland) Fusiliers, and it is perhaps unnecessary to say more than that. They settled themselves down behind such cover as was obtainable, and swore, in their grim, North-country fashion, that so long as a cartridge remained they would hold the hill against all comers.

The Boers began at dawn of day. De Wet had posted his men so as to preclude all possibility of escape for the British force. His guns had the range almost immediately; and when they had found it they pounded the kop with shrapnel in one incessant hail. And the Boers in the broken ground below fired steadily and cannily, after their wont, at the parapets of the sangars where Irish Riflemen and Northumberland Fusiliers huddled in close array.

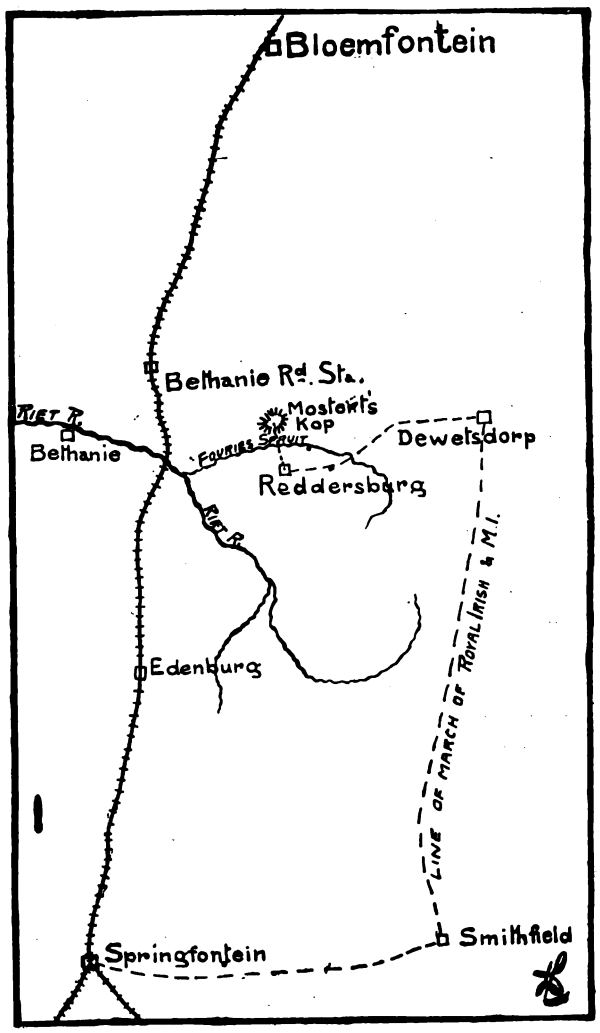


DIAGRAM SHOWING POSITION OF REDDERSBURG AND MOSTERT'S KOP.

The defenders, on their part, saved their cartridges as well as they could. Not a man fired unless a Boer showed himself, except when De Wet tried to bring one of his guns up to a position only 2,000 yards from the kop. Then there were some volleys, and the Boer artillery fell back. Weary, weary work it was for the dashing Irishmen and the Fighting Fifth. Why did the dirty Dutchmen not charge the position? Then there would be some work to put heart into a man. But to lie sniping and being sniped at all day was trying to the nerves.

Two of the Irish Rifles did a bit of work characteristic of the reckless daring of the men. On their side of the hill not a Boer

would show himself. The Mauser bullets seemed to come from nowhere. So the two Irishmen agreed that one should show himself above the cover of the sangar; this would probably bring out a Boer to have a shot. And while the said Boer was shooting at No. 1, No. 2 should try his skill on the Boer. Then No. 2 was to offer himself as a bait, and No. 1 do the shooting.

So the first Irishman stood boldly up. Crack! went a rifle down below. But the owner of that rifle had exposed his right eye, and arm, and shoulder; and almost simultaneously with his own a rifle cracked from the summit of the kop. The Irish marksman dropped his rifle to stanch the wound of his comrade. There was much blood behind the sangar. "Did ye hit'm?" gasped the stricken man. "Yes! In the face." "I thought ye would, old man. I thought——" And no more words came. No more words, only spurts of blood. "By God!" said the "pal," as he shook an enraged fist, "I'd die—an' glad to—for five minutes at ye."

The sun blared down on Mostert's Kop. From the cool, gray hours of the early morn until noon: from the sweltering hour of noon until twilight. It shone on that desperate band of grimy, dust-choked men. Tongues were swelling at the root, sure sign of parching thirst; and not a drop of water to be had for love or gold. Strong men began to retch. Their bodies faint with hunger. Yet not a crumb to stay the pangs. Worse than the rifles of the burghers; worse, far worse, than the shrieking, bursting shrapnel was the terrible thirst of those waterless men broiling in the tropic sun.

Bodies were faint and weary. The thirst, the hunger, the lying on the ground in cramped positions for a whole day—all told their tale. But the spirits of those men were still unbroken.

"Only a common soldier!" What boundless valour, what constancy, what daring of death, disease, and hardship the words cover. "Only!" For his country's sake and his regiment's honour he suffers the agonies of death and wounds: he bears the tortures of hunger and thirst. And if you want him to dare any other danger you have only to send him where that danger is to be met with. Only a "common" soldier! Is virtue, then, so common? Is valour? Is greatness of heart?

After fighting at long range all day, the men slept where they had fought. Merciful night was their bulwark and protection. But before they threw themselves on the ground the officers said: "If we are not relieved in the morning we shall be taken, every man of us. The cartridges are nearly done."

So they prayed for the morning and Gatacre, being persuaded that "Old Back-acher" would never abandon them. As for themselves—by holding the hill all day against artillery and without food or water, they had done gloriously. Gatacre would surely be there in the morning with all his host; and De Wet would rue the day he besieged Mostert's Kop.

And what was "Old Back-acher" doing this night when a battalion of his division was bivouacking on a bare hill-top, with a ring of foes around them? This is what he was doing. Whisper it softly, Britons.

Nothing!

All night over 1,000 men lay at Reddersburg, within five miles of Mostert's Kop. They could hear the guns shelling their comrades. Eighteen field guns

were there—one of which would have saved the little flying column from destruction. We must not do General Sir William Gatacre an injustice—his force did not encamp at Reddersburg. It did not even bivouac. But all night the men stood under arms—horses saddled, guns limbered up. Nor was it until 8 a.m. the next morning (April 4th) that orders came to move. At that hour the 3rd Infantry Division and the Camerons began to file along the road to Reddersburg.

Ere this, indeed at sunrise, the beleaguered troops on Mostert's Kop had looked forth, scanning the horizon anxiously. Field-glasses swept the veldt to north and east, to south and west. Why tarried Gatacre so long? Could it be that he did not know of the dire straits of his men? It must be. For William Gatacre, of Atbara, was a comrade true and bold. He never would leave his men in the lurch.

Then Lieutenant Stacpoole, of the Northumberland Fusiliers, volunteered to try to pierce the enemy's lines. He thought he saw a way of breaking through to Reddersburg; and once there he would soon put himself in communication with the general. He set out on horseback; and rode cautiously, taking advantage of every roll in the veldt to hide himself from Boer eyes. Now leading his horse up a donga, now galloping over the rolling plain, he accomplished his dangerous mission. Reddersburg in sight—now, old horse! And so at an early hour of the morning there galloped into the little Dutch township a British officer.

But he reckoned without his host. The Boers were on the outskirts ready to delay the khakis when the advance should be begun. Before he could get through, Stacpoole was seen; rifles cracked; and Stacpoole dropped, or rather was pitched out of the saddle. One marksman had slain the horse; another, with aim less true, had hit the rider in the arm. The young lieutenant was carried, bleeding, into a house, and his wound bound up; and there he was left.

At Mostert's Kop, four miles away, the game had recommenced. Fast and furious the Dutch gunners hurled shrapnel upon the summit of the hill. Fast and furious their riflemen fired. And the Irish Rifles were long silent—the Fighting Fifth were dumb. For an hour they suffered the lead-storm, nor answered one single shot.

Why? The men had come to the last three cartridges.

Hasten, "Old Back-acher!" Hasten with your battalions and your batteries! Brave men are at the last gasp of resistance. You could make your men march once: make them march now!

The Boers creep up the hill a little. Joy, the fierce joy of the warrior, seizes the hearts of the long-suffering infantry on Mostert's Kop. The foe are about to rush. Now, lads, are your bayonets in order? But the Dutchmen know better than to come to close quarters. They settle down on the slope of the kop, and fire steadily; and it becomes absolutely necessary to make some reply to them. If not, they will crawl up, firing, foot by foot. So the precious cartridges are spent, one by one, and few of them ineffectually. The pouches of dead and wounded comrades are ransacked for the remains of their ammunition; and thus a scanty fire of musketry replies to the blasting fusillade of the Dutchmen.

Along the road from Bethanie, horsemen are riding—British horsemen. Gatacre has detached his advance guard—some companies of mounted infantry, under

Colonel Sitwell—to push on rapidly ; but never a gun goes with them. The main body and the artillery march leisurely along like troops with all eternity before them. Sitwell hears the firing, and knows the guns for Boer guns ; and as he nears Mostert's Kop his ear catches the constant spt-spt! of the Mausers and the intermittent cracks of the Lee-Metfords.

The Royal Irish are not caught yet, evidently. "Push on, my lads, your comrades are hard pressed." So the advance guard dashes forward with what speed it may—when suddenly a terrible blaze of musketry breaks out in the front. "Dismount! Horses to number threes! Skirmishing order—advance!" The mounted infantry press forward to the fight ; but the enemy is strongly posted, and drives them back once, twice, thrice. Then Sitwell, knowing not the state of things on Mostert's Kop, deems it wise to draw his men off and wait for the main body.

Had he but known! The Irish Rifles had fired their last cartridge ; the Northumberlands had emptied their pouches ; and the officers, those of them who had not fallen to the enemy's fire, were deliberating. The men would have asked nothing better than to be led down the hill to the charge ; to break through at the cost of half their number. For the Irish Rifles loathed the thought of surrender ; and did not the Fifth share with the Black Watch the ancient glory of having charged and overthrown with the bayonet a regiment of horse in full career?

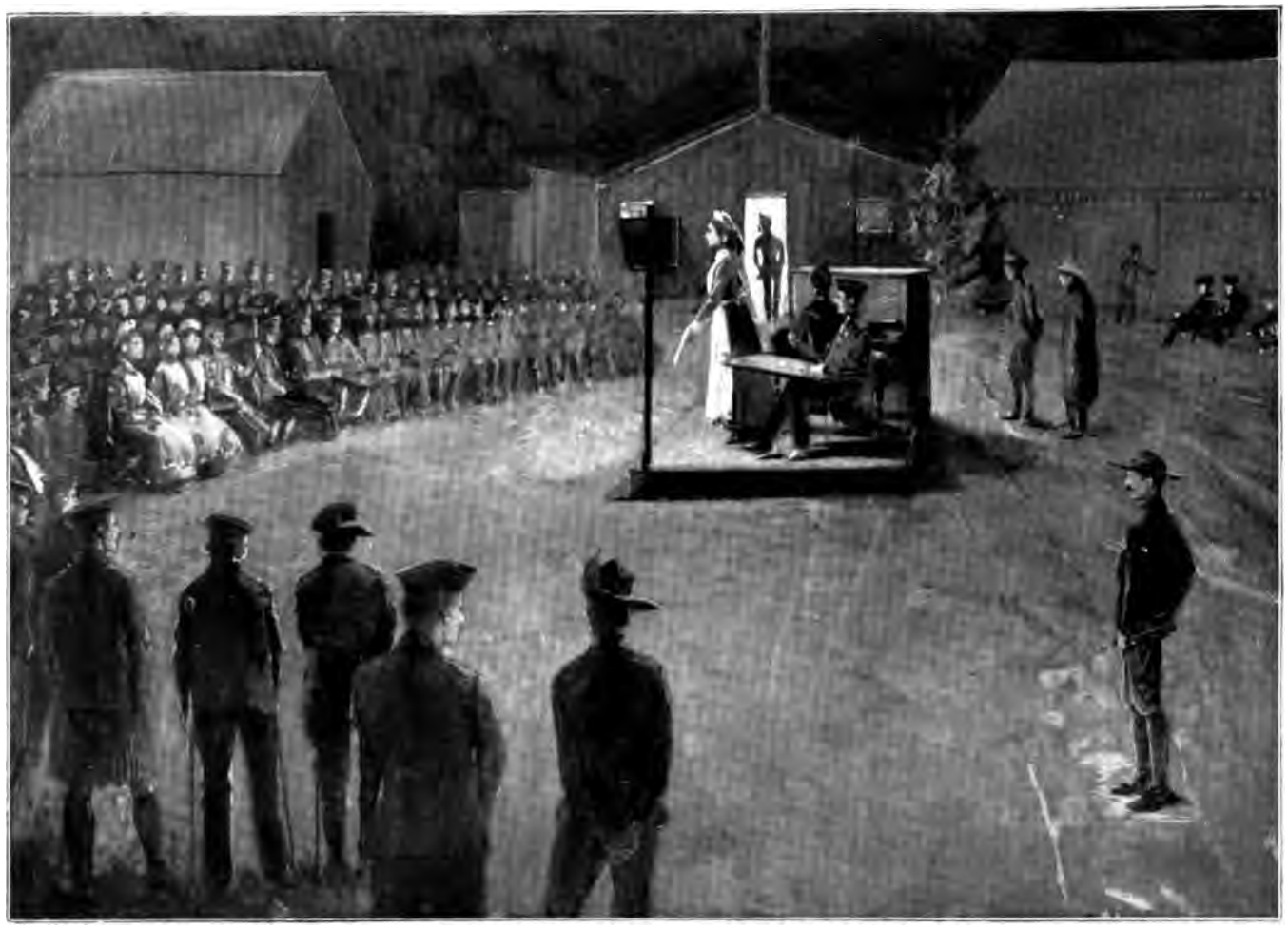
But the officers had a great responsibility on their shoulders. They dared not throw away lives uselessly. Men were dropping round them every moment, and their only arms were worthless. To charge and break through would mean a loss of three men out of four, if not total extermination; and so, at 9 a.m., having held the kop for a day and a half without food or water, the garrison, having fired its last cartridge, hoisted the white flag and laid down its arms.

And Gatacre at that moment was not more than half an hour's forced march distant. But the Marching General, the most energetic man in the British army, had sadly changed of late. Hollow-eyed he was, and weary—worn out by the anxieties of his Cape Colony campaign—affected, too, no doubt, by the ghastly failure of his attack on Stormberg. There was no forced marching with him that day ; and it is more than likely that, even if the general had ordered an extra turn of speed, he would not have got it from men tired and worn by standing up all night after a long railway journey. The Camerons could scarcely crawl, so fagged were they.

At 10.30 a.m. Gatacre arrived on the scene of action, by which time De Wet had departed, taking his prisoners with him.

And now comes the strangest part of all this strange story. The general must have been well aware, from the report of Colonel Sitwell, that the Boers could not be very far away, because that officer had heard fighting between 8 a.m. and 9 a.m. The surrender must have taken a little time ; and Olivier, encumbered as he was with a large number of weary prisoners, could not be travelling at very high speed. Yet there was no pursuit—no semblance of pursuit. The Boers were allowed to depart entirely unmolested ; and Gatacre contented himself with occupying the town of Reddersburg, releasing Stacpoole, and capturing fifteen Boers who had stayed too long behind.

Thus ended, for this campaign, the career of Sir William Gatacre, than whom



A HOSPITAL OPEN-AIR "SMOKER."

no British general had gone out with a brighter reputation. His work, let it be said, had been of an exceptionally difficult character—the force at his disposal until quite at the end had been ridiculously inadequate ; and by a series of misfortunes his reputation as a tactician, if not quite lost, was tarnished. In a few days it was announced that he was about to return to England. He did return; but before he left he received a tribute such as has rarely fallen to a man so situated. The Cameron Highlanders, marching through his camp, broke through all the restraints of discipline, and raised three hearty British cheers for " Old Back-acher."

The magnetism of the man was marvellous. In England he had been called a hard man because of the amount of work he was accustomed to expect from the troops under his command. But the men who had worked and fought under him knew better. They knew that Gatacre never asked a man or a regiment to do more than he was prepared to do himself. He had led his troops to a disaster of the Magersfontein kind, but still those troops were prepared to follow him to the end of the world. He had led his men on when he might well have held back ; he had hesitated when he might have gone on boldly ; and yet they cheered him. Verily the hour of his downfall was also the hour of triumph.

And so, amid a burst of cheers, vanishes from the stage of war Sir William Gatacre.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

SUBDUING THE LAND—THE SOUTH-WEST FREE STATE.

FOR military purposes the Free State may be considered as divided into halves by the railway which runs through Springfontein and continues on to Bloemfontein and thence to Pretoria. When we speak of the eastern Free State, we must be understood to mean the Free State east of that railway: in like manner of the western Free State. The south-western Free State will indicate that part of the country lying west of the line and south of Bloemfontein. The south-eastern Free State means that part of the country lying east of the line and south of Bloemfontein.

There were three British forces operating in the south of the Free State. Gatacre was due south of the railway line at Springfontein. On his right was the Colonial division under Brabant, whose mission it was to deal with the south-eastern district. On Gatacre's left was Clements, to whom had been allotted the task of subduing the south-west district.

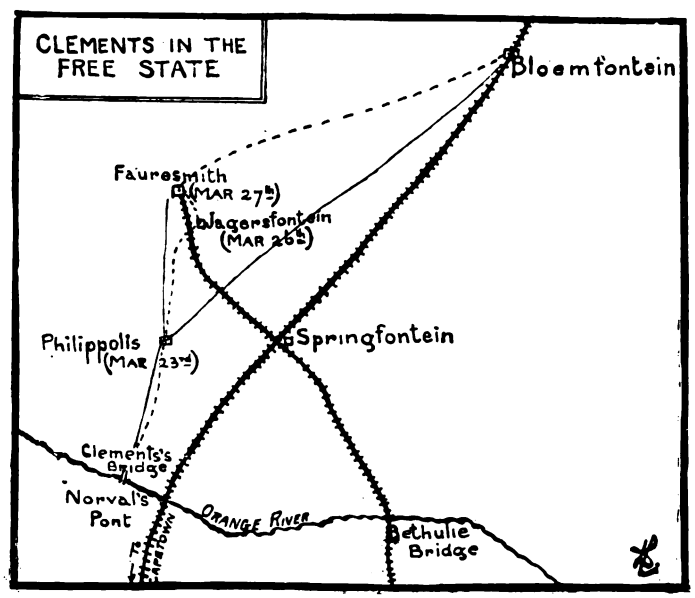


DIAGRAM SHOWING THE MOVEMENTS OF GENERAL CLEMENTS AROUND FAURESMITH.

Lord Roberts ordered Clements to sweep up his corner of the country and clear out any guerilla commandoes, compel submission of all the towns, to disarm and administer the oath of neutrality to all the

burghers whom he could lay hands on. Only those who refused to take the oath were to be made prisoners.

We have related in a previous chapter how the Boers retired from Colesberg over Norval's Pont, destroying the bridge behind them. This, of course, cut off Clements's easiest road into the Free State, and he was delayed for some little time on the south bank of the Orange by the necessity for throwing a bridge across the stream to convey his transport.

For this bridge he pitched on a spot several miles to the west of Norval's Pont; and the Engineers having selected the best place they could find—a place, that is, offering good ground to land on at the other side—the whole force moved up and began to prepare the crossing.

First of all, it was necessary to throw across a small force to take possession of a chain of hills on the north bank. For it would have been disastrous if, when the transport was crossing, the enemy had suddenly appeared with a gun or two and started shelling. It was no easy matter to ferry 300 or 400 men across a river 250 yards wide and running with a strong current. There were no sailor men with Clements to bear a hand and show the landsmen how to overcome difficulties. But some of the Worcestershire Regiment, getting possession of a number of the flat-bottomed pontoons used by the Royal Engineers for bridging rivers, managed to ferry over the advanced guard. The semi-circular chain of outposts having been posted on the north bank, the Engineers began to build their bridge. The strong current was a great hindrance, but for all that the bridge was speedily ready.

Probably you know how it is done. The first pont is chained to posts or sticks on the hither bank. Then another pont is fastened to that one, then a third to the second, and so the bridge is pushed over the stream and finally chained to both banks. On top of the pontoons planks are laid, and so is constructed a bridge able to bear great weights. The great disadvantage of it is that it has no protection at the sides, and it gives under foot. This does not matter much when men are marching over; but it becomes a serious disadvantage when animals are being driven across.

The timid beasts, on feeling the bridge apparently about to give way under them, are apt to become frightened and to plunge and kick. This applies especially to mules. Clements's transport lost a good many mules in that way. A waggon would be half-way across when one of the team would take fright, communicate his terror to his companions, and soon the whole string of mules would be kicking and plunging violently. The drivers had to stand by with sharp knives; for if the mules managed to plunge themselves overboard, ropes had to be cut instantly to save the waggon from following it. More than once the knives had to be used that day, and then the whole transport was delayed while a strong party of soldiers came down to the pontoon, seized the waggon, and pulled and pushed it to the north bank and out of the way. But at last the army and transport, down to the last waggon, was conveyed over, and on the 20th of March Clements was in the Free State.

Orders came to send part of his cavalry and mounted infantry and artillery to join the main army at Bloemfontein. The rest of the corps set out due north, marching on Philippolis.

Between Clements and that town was a range of hills with only one good pass, called Doonkerspoort—a fine place for a

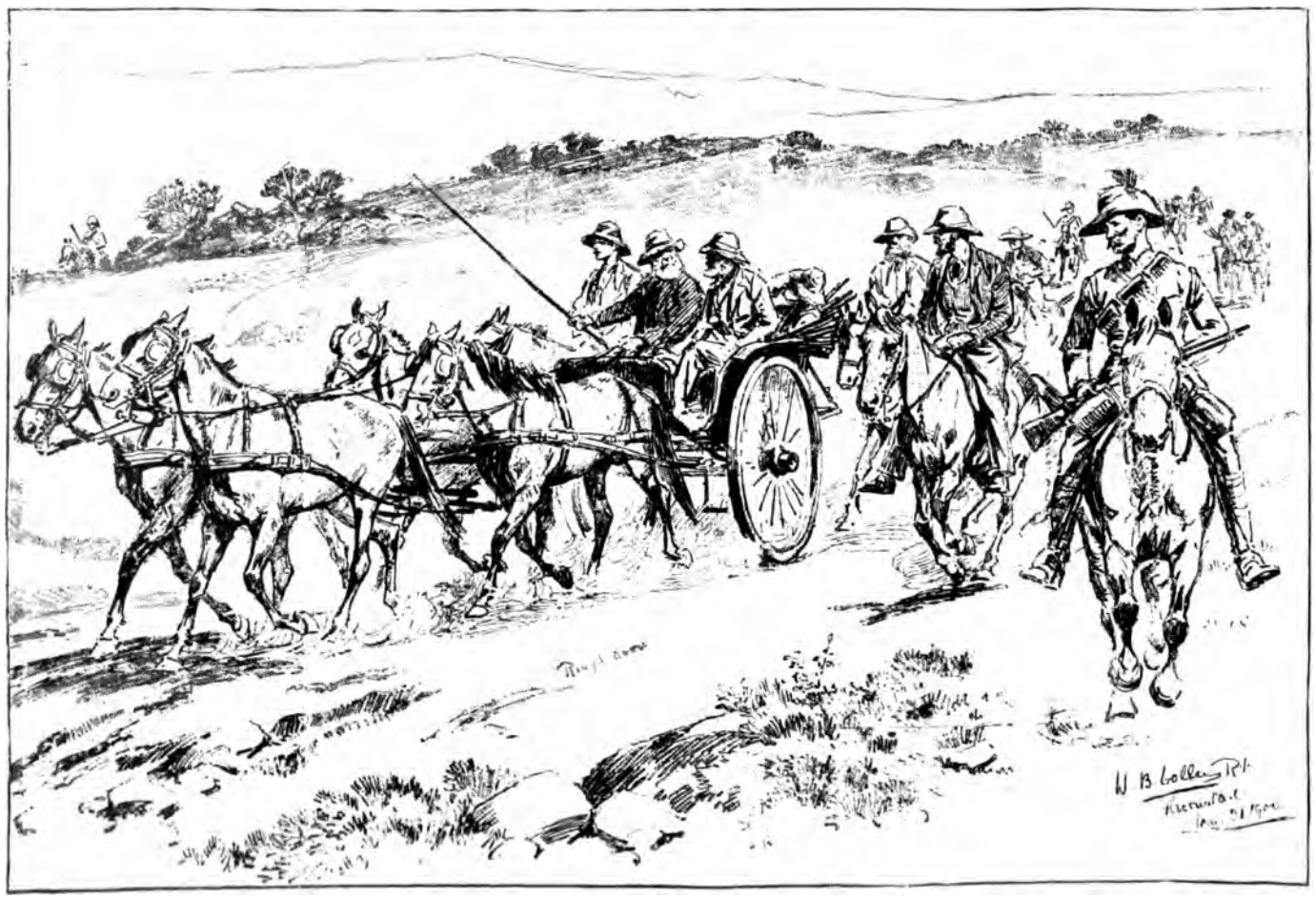
stand. But the Boers in this part of the country had been thoroughly cowed, and not a single shot alarmed the British column. The 23rd of March saw Clements in Philippolis, a town of importance as towns go in South Africa.

Clements halted outside, and sent out scouts to see whether he might expect resistance. But the burghers had received news of Lord Roberts's proclamation, and they removed all anxiety by sending out messengers offering to surrender. The British force marched in in triumph. The landdröst promptly made formal submission, and surrendered the town to General Clements. The Union Jack was hoisted where the yellow flag of the Free State once flew. The townsfolk and many burghers from the country round came in and delivered up rifles and ammunition. Several hundreds of them took the oath of neutrality, swearing on the Gospels not to bear arms against the Queen any more during the campaign, upon which papers were given to them certifying that they had duly submitted themselves, and they were allowed to depart in peace.

On the 24th the column proceeded north again. Patrols scoured the country for many a mile to right and left, visiting farmhouses by the way. Almost every single farm flew the white flag of surrender. In some cases the troopers found the houses tenanted only by women, the men being still away on commando. In other cases the men of the house, or some of them, were at home, and these delivered up rifles and took the oath, more or less willingly. Sometimes the only rifle offered to the British officer would be a Martini, or even an ancient elephant gun, and in scores of cases it turned out that the burghers who handed in such a weapon had one or two Mausers snugly secreted about the house, or carefully buried.

When an antiquated weapon was offered and the burgher swore, as he always did, that this was the only gun he had in the house or in his possession, the wise British officer invariably seized some of the Kaffir servants and cross-examined them. By threats, cajolery, and bribes, many Kaffirs were induced to tell where the real arms were concealed, and it happened frequently that a man who had with oaths and protestations delivered up an elephant gun and twenty cartridges to match, turned out to have in his possession two or three Mausers, and anything from a hundred to a thousand cartridges.

There were other incidents of the march much more serious and lamentable. We have said that the farms almost invariably flew the white flag. But more than once this emblem was used merely as a decoy. Of honour, as it is known amongst the civilised nations of Europe, many of the Boer farmers seemed to have not the slightest idea. Not once, but a thousand times, it happened that a small patrol of three, four, or five men would ride up to a house whence fluttered an enormous white table-cloth, usually, by the way, freshly starched and ironed. Seeing the white flag, the British patrol would ride up quite openly, without even having their rifles unslung. And when they were almost on the threshold there would burst forth from the windows, or perhaps from some outbuilding hard by, a tremendous fusillade of musketry. In those days, many and many a British trooper paid with his life for being so foolish as to trust the Boer white flag. It is to the credit of the men forming the British army in South Africa that notwithstanding even this provocation they did not burn and utterly destroy every-



FREE STATE BURGHERS COMING IN TO DELIVER ARMS AND AMMUNITION.

guilty house. Indeed, for a good many weeks this kind of treachery was suffered without retaliation.

On leaving Philippolis, after having cleared up the district, Clements's column moved on to Jagersfontein, a town in the veldt a few miles away from a line of rail which runs from Springfontein to Fauresmith. Jagersfontein also surrendered without resistance, on the 26th of March, and Clements immediately wheeled round to the north-west and marched on Fauresmith.

Fauresmith was of some importance because it happened to be the terminus of a branch railway which joined the main line at Springfontein, and being the centre of a great agricultural district, it might form a very useful depôt. Grain and oxen could be there collected, sent down to Springfontein by rail, and thence again by rail to Bloemfontein. On the 27th of March Clements entered Fauresmith, where, as usual, the landdröst and principal burghers surrendered the town, the Union Jack was hoisted, and the Queen's Peace proclaimed. After a few days of scouring the country round Fauresmith, collecting arms and receiving submissions, Clements was ordered to proceed to Bloemfontein. This he did, arriving there without incident on the 5th of April.

Altogether, during his march from the Orange River, the British general had received the submission of about four thousand burghers and rebels—had destroyed large quantities of ammunition, and taken possession of hundreds of rifles. And nowhere, except in the cases of those farms which we have mentioned, where the white flag was used as a cover for treachery, had he met with any resistance. Amongst a certain class of the population, indeed, there was even satisfaction at the conquest of the Republic by her Majesty's troops. For in the southern part of the Free State dwelt large numbers of persons of true British descent. They were chiefly Scottish; and most of them had strenuously opposed the war from the outset. Numbers of these men now welcomed their kinsfolk. For they did not relish the idea of a South Africa in which the Boer should be lord and ruler over all.

It could be said that the south-west of the Orange Free State was now really held by the British. It is a rule of international law that no country is "occupied" unless it is "effectively" occupied. And the tests of effective occupation are, first, the absence of any large body of the enemy under arms to interfere with British administration of the country; second, the presence of an efficient force capable of preserving, and actually preserving, order. Both these tenets were fulfilled by General Clements in respect of the south-western corner of the Free State. He had established British authority there, and had cleared the country of the enemy.

All along the railway line from Bloemfontein to Bethulie a strong guard had been established. The reason was that on the east of the line a considerable body of Boers still kept afoot, and it was absolutely essential to prevent these men from cutting the communications, and also to prevent them from breaking through to the west of the line and harrying such of the burghers as had submitted.

Clements and his corps finished their clearing up operations to considerable applause. For of all the armies that had been in the field, with the exception of the main army, since the advent of Lord Roberts, this force had done its work the best, first under French, then ably led by Clements. Now they were to be employed on the other side of the line.

CHAPTER LXXV.

THE SOUTH-EAST CORNER.

IT was on Sunday, the 11th of March, that Brabant and his troopers rode into Aliwal North. It was hereabout that the loyalists had suffered more severely at the hands of the invaders and their allies, the rebels, than anywhere else except in Natal. Farms had been stripped of stock. Shops and warehouses had been cleared of their stores. Nor was this material damage all. It is not too much to say that the lives of the British-born inhabitants had been rendered a burden to them by the insolence and overbearing behaviour of the Dutch.

Commandant Olivier, who commanded the army of invasion in this district, had not hesitated to ill-treat Englishmen who refused to serve against the Queen. The Orange Free State flag had been hoisted in Aliwal, and the district proclaimed as part of the Orange Free State. Olivier thereupon proceeded to apply the Free State laws, all and sundry, within the district. And one of those laws was that every burgher over sixteen and under sixty-five could be called upon to fight when the government needed him. One Viljoen, a British subject, was appointed by Olivier field-cornet of the district. This man accepted office with alacrity, and proceeded to commandeer the property of loyalists, and even their persons, with a hearty good-will. He administered martial law with ruthless severity, even going so far as to imprison women for repeating gossip about British successes.

But now Olivier and Viljoen and all their crew had been driven back over the border, and the loyal subjects of Victoria rejoiced exceedingly. It must be confessed also that especially amongst the women there was a great exultation over the humiliating position of the disloyalists. There was a kind of feeling expressed in the words "Now it is our turn." And however much the British section of the populace might desire to keep down race feeling, they could not help the gleam of triumphant satisfaction which illuminated their faces as they saw the Dutch doffing their hats and bowing low, not merely to the British officers but to any one of Brabant's troopers whom they might happen to meet.

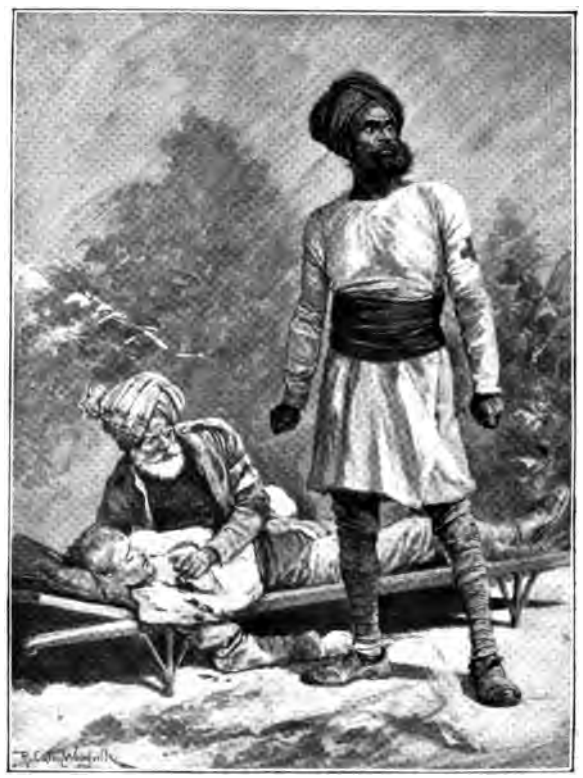
Early on the morning of the 12th the Union Jack was hoisted with much ceremony and amidst great cheering, both by the troops and the people. In fact, so universal were the expressions of satisfaction that one would have imagined that Aliwal North had been the chiefest stronghold of loyalty, instead of the home of those who had aided and abetted and comforted the enemies of Britain.

But General Brabant had something else to do than take part in mere ceremonies. The enemy was still alive and active on the north side of the river. True, the main body departed on the night of the 11th, but small patrols had been left behind to watch the motions of the British and to annoy them as much as possible.

During the whole of the 12th, sniping

went on across the river. The men of Brabant's Horse and Driscoll's Scouts and the other mounted regiments spread themselves all over the country, taking especial care to watch the river so as to guard against any flanking movement by the wily Olivier. One party of the 1st Regiment of Brabant's Horse was stationed on the Cape Colony bank of the Orange, opposite to a house, the residence of a prominent Free Stater called Wessel. At first the British party, believing the place to be untenanted, or, at least, only occupied by Wessel's family, picketed their horses in the open. A heavy fire from the house soon made them more careful, and all day long the British picket kept up a sniping fire on the house—a fire returned with great heartiness.

No one was hurt, though hundreds of cartridges were expended—a circumstance to be ascribed not to the badness of the marksmanship, but rather to the skill with which both sides took cover. The first discharge of the Boers, however, had been fatal to the horse of a certain scout of the 1st Brabant's Horse. The scout was a South American Spaniard named Cordova, a dare-devil fellow, who had come over to South Africa when trouble broke out.



THE DANGERS OF MERCY.

INDIAN STRETCHER-BEARERS FIRED UPON BY THE BOERS.

The South American was exceeding wrath at the loss of his mount, and he vowed revenge—a vow not unlikely to be kept when the man who makes it is of Spanish blood. That very night he stuffed his bandolier with cartridges, carefully cleaned and oiled his rifle, and with it sallied forth into the night. He swam the river with ease, and cautiously made his way to Wessel's house. No sentry challenged, and the scout reached the very wall of the house unnoticed. Then he listened and heard the sound of many voices. Whereupon he retired for a few yards, and, charging the magazine of his rifle, he fired two shots in rapid succession, one through the window and the other through the door.

Instantly all was confusion. A dozen armed Boers rushed out of the house in such haste that they fairly tumbled over one another. The scout, hidden by the darkness, calmly continued firing, and contrived to empty his magazine so rapidly as to convince the Dutchmen that they were attacked by a large party. And so they fled to the place where their horses were standing, saddled and bridled, threw themselves into the saddle, and galloped off. But the wily Spaniard had changed position. Running as hard as he could, he contrived to get within shot of them again, and, taking quick sight, he dropped a Dutchman out of his saddle. The other Boers did not stay to pick up their wounded comrade, and Cordova had the satisfaction of leading into camp a prisoner, a horse, and a rifle.

On the same day (12th) a party of sappers went to Burghersdorp, a place whence the railway line branched off to Aliwal. They found the line considerably damaged, but by the 15th they had made such temporary repairs as to allow of light trains being run.

Brabant's operations, taken together with the news of Roberts's success, soon began to have a great effect on the rebels with Olivier. And on the 12th and 13th some 400 of them came riding into Brabant's camp, and tendered submission. They were asked to take the oath of allegiance, and were then dismissed to their farms. A few, however—those who had been particularly active in the rebellion and in the ill-treatment of the loyal population, were sent to Sterkstroom, to be tried for treason. For several days rebels trickled in in small companies, and sometimes singly. All who surrendered tendered the excuse of *force majeure*. They had not willingly joined the invaders, they said ; but being threatened with all manner of pains and penalties if they did not, they had finally joined the Queen's enemies.

On the 19th Brabant made a move. He detached a force of the Kaffrarian Rifles, to the number of about 400, and sent them under Major Cuming across the Orange to take possession of the town of Rouxville. Rouxville was the most considerable place in the south-eastern corner of the Free State, being the seat of government of the district. Cuming's force, in addition to 400 Kaffrarian Rifles, comprised two Naval 12-pounders, not, however, manned by sailors, but by garrison artillery. Brabant had discovered that if he had his heavy guns drawn by teams of oxen he would never be able to hurry, so he had these 12-pounders drawn by teams of mules. The Kaffrarian Rifles were volunteers raised in Cape Colony, part mounted infantry and part infantry, and they had a section of cyclists as scouts and despatch riders. Altogether, a very fine, well-organised corps.

The column marched to Rouxville without any incident by the way, save the

capture of some waggons and ammunition which had been abandoned and hidden by the Boers. In the town itself they met with no resistance. The landdröst, with great show of goodwill, took the oath or allegiance, and accepted office as a British magistrate. The British flag was hoisted in the market-place, and the troopers sang "God Save the Queen" with the greatest possible heartiness. Altogether, the reception of the troops at Rouxville was anything but hostile. Farmers came in from the outlying country and surrendered arms and ammunition. In return for them taking the oath of neutrality they were allowed to go back to their farms—a measure of clemency they had little right to expect. Then, on the 21st of March, the Kaffrarians marched on to Zastron, a place to the north-east of Rouxville, where more burghers came in to surrender, and the Colonials found a great quantity of concealed stores.

The same day on which Zastron was occupied, Sir Alfred Milner, the Governor-General of the Cape, came up to Aliwal and reviewed the Colonial Division—a compliment well deserved.

Brabant's next move was to take possession of Wepener, a small town in the Orange Free State, on the south bank of the river Caledon, and quite close to the Basuto border. It was about 85 miles from Aliwal to Wepener, and the nearest support that a force there would have would be a small force of white troops who had been sent to preserve order amongst the Basutos. On the 26th of March Captain Goddard led out of Aliwal North two squadrons of the 1st Regiment of Brabant's Horse, *en route* for Wepener.

On the afternoon of the 29th, the little column reached Bushman's Kop, having travelled over 60 miles, when they heard that a large Boer force was retiring on Wepener from the direction of Ladybrand. Goddard acted with the utmost promptitude. He sent back to Rouxville for reinforcements. And himself pushed on, post haste, to Wepener. In order that he might march light, he left all his waggons behind at Bushman's Kop with a small guard. He even caused his men to disencumber their horses of all impedimenta, except merely the harness, and with 200 horsemen, carrying nothing but their rifles and bandoliers, he headed for Wepener that day. It was hard riding, but the squadrons covered the 24 miles that afternoon, and cantered into the street of Wepener early in the evening of the 29th, after a march of 85 miles in 60 hours.

The first proceeding was to hoist the inevitable Union Jack. But the reception accorded her Majesty's troops was vastly different to that accorded to the Kaffrarian Rifles at Rouxville. Instead of a welcome, the Colonials met with nothing but scowling looks of unconcealed hostility. The landdröst, one Fraser, being asked if he was willing to take the oath and govern the town for her Majesty, promptly and emphatically refused. He was sent away on the instant to Aliwal North. Goddard proclaimed, in the usual way, that all rifles were to be brought in and given up to him. The Dutchmen did not dare to refuse compliance altogether, but the weapons they produced were of such a kind that it was the merest farce to call their act a delivering up of arms. Ancient Sniders and flint lock guns, with here and there a damaged Martini or Mauser—such were the weapons handed in to Brabant's Horse. And Goddard's force was so small that he dared not deal out justice with a high hand.

Rumours flew thick of the advance of an enormous Boer force on Wepener, and Goddard was almost persuaded to abandon the town. But he decided not to run away if he could hold it, and instead of retreating he telegraphed to Mafeteng, a town about 24 miles away, in Basutoland, begging for reinforcements. That night the squadrons slept under arms, every man with the magazine of his rifle charged. But day broke without a shot having been fired, and with the day came riding in from Mafeteng Captain Steele of the Royal Scots, with 75 mounted infantry of his regiment. The next day Captain Driscoll made his appearance at the head of his scouts, who, to the number of 60, had ridden hard from Rouxville.

Driscoll's Scouts were soon out and about, and that very day contrived to lay their hands on Viljeon, the arch-rebel of Aliwal North. Him they hailed to prison, where he wept profusely and begged in the most heartrending way for mercy. It was good for him that the British officers had not been invested with summary powers; if they had been, Viljeon would have been shot on the spot. As it was he was merely passed back to Aliwal North to be tried for treason. Brabant's Horse and the scouts and the mounted infantry scoured the country round for weapons; and, for fear of a domiciliary visit from the troopers, many a farmer brought in what he called his arms, and surrendered them to Goddard

"HE WAS BLINDFOLDED AND TAKEN TO MAJOR MAXWELL" (*p.* 887).

at Wepener. But the burghers, one and all, though they pretended to submit, were anything but submissive in their behaviour. It was lucky for them they had not to deal with a brother officer. Such a one would not have allowed them to argue as they did. Some of them even asked to be paid for the weapons they gave up.

Native after native came in from Basutoland with stories of a Boer concentration on Wepener. Numbers of Basutos, who were one and all friendly to the British, and anxious to assist them, voluntarily went out as spies, nor could a commando move or a patrol scout a single mile without word of it being taken to the British officers. From all sides, it appeared, the Dutchmen were moving on the little border town ; and the British officers at Wepener began to get exceedingly uneasy. They telegraphed and heliographed to Aliwal North for reinforcements. They represented that if a very considerable force did not come to their aid and come speedily, they would be obliged to abandon Wepener and retire. It did not require any observation of theirs to inform Brabant what a bad effect this would have, not only in the districts newly subdued, but also among the Basutos.

Accordingly, on the 1st of April, the Colonial general despatched the greater part of his division, with orders to hurry on to the town on the Caledon, and to hold it against all comers. Colonel Dalgety was in chief command. A tough warrior he ; colonel of the Cape Mounted Rifles. He was a man utterly fearless, and as dogged as any man could be.

The reinforcements pressed on without delay, and arrived at Wepener on the 4th of April. With the men already there, Dalgety found himself in command of about 2,000 men, of whom about 1,750 were fighting men. The force was made up of :

Cape Mounted Rifles (Colonel Dalgety) ...	400
Kaffrarian Rifles (Captain Price)	400
1st Brabant's Horse (Major Henderson) ...	350
2nd Brabant's Horse (Colonel Grenfell) ...	600
Driscoll's Scouts	60
Royal Scots M.I. (Captain Steele) ...	75
Royal Engineers (Major Maxwell) ...	20
	1,905

Artillery also accompanied the column under command of Captain Lukin, of the Cape Mounted Rifles. It consisted of two Naval guns (15-pounders), two 7-pounders belonging to the Cape Mounted Rifles, and one Hotchkiss quick-firing gun, carrying 12½-pound shell. In addition there were four Maxim guns.

The reinforcements arrived none too soon, for hardly had Dalgety ridden into Wepener when a hostile messenger arrived. He was a German, and he encountered Maxwell's party of sappers, who were entrenching. Asked what he wanted, the German replied that he wanted to see the British commander. He was blindfolded and taken to Major Maxwell, when he produced a letter. The letter said :

" I am here with a few thousand burghers. In the cause of humanity, to prevent terrible slaughter, I ask your immediate surrender.

" (Signed) BANKS, General."

One regrets to say that the threat of terrible slaughter, and the appeal to the sacred cause of humanity, had no other effect on the major of sappers than to cause him to laugh consumedly. " Tell your general," he said to the German, " there is no answer. Or, by the way, I may have misunderstood the letter. It may be that General Banks desires to surrender himself. You may tell him that he and his men will be treated with leniency." The messenger was then led outside the

lines, the handkerchief removed from his eyes, and he was sent about his business.

Driscoll's Scouts were indefatigable. They seemed to smell concealed arms and ammunition, and in the course of one day they actually dug up as many as 400 new Martinis, and a large quantity of ammunition. In this they were assisted by the Basutos, to whom it was a labour of love. But the Basutos were very much grieved when, instead of making a present of a few rifles to them, his trusted allies, Driscoll smashed to pieces every single Martini, and blew up the whole of the ammunition.

There was now no doubt that a good many Boers were in the neighbourhood advancing on Wepener with hostile intent. It was also evident that if the town were to be held for the Queen, it must be put in a defensible state without loss of time. So Major Maxwell surveyed the ground with great care, and the result of his labours was to convince him that the town of Wepener itself was absolutely indefensible.

Accordingly, Colonel Dalgety resolved to abandon the town and to take up his position at some place hard by where it would be possible for him to stand a siege. Now there is, overlooking Wepener, an exceedingly high mountain called Jammers Berg, which runs down to the Caledon.

At the foot of the mountain is a bridge called Jammers Berg Bridge, and on the other side of the bridge was a flour mill belonging to one Robinson. Round the mill clustered a good many buildings, including several houses, the residences of the mill owner, and some of his staff. Now the mill was in the loop of a horse-shoe of kopjes, and here Dalgety decided to take his stand. The river would give plenty of water for the men. The mill and houses would serve as hospitals, and the river would protect one side of the position from any attempt at a rush.

There was one serious disadvantage, namely, that the whole position was commanded by the Jammers Berg and other higher kopjes. But Maxwell was of opinion that the Boers would find it exceedingly difficult to carry their guns to the top of the big mountain, and he thought, on the whole, that he could make the position selected defensible. The British themselves would have chosen the higher kopjes for their camp had it not been that they would have been forced into one of two alternatives—either the line to be defended would have extended to about twenty miles, or they would have been obliged to abandon the river. And abandoning the river meant abandoning the only water supply available in the country.

So Maxwell organised strong fatigue parties, and with these proceeded to build schanzes, dig trenches and make redoubts. The Boers might appear at any moment, so it was essential to make haste. And the hardy Colonials did work hard. They laboured with pick and shovel, they carried stones, they did the work of navvies, and the result was that in about four days' time they had constructed a position, the lines of which extended for about nine miles.

There were one or two weak spots. To begin with, the northernmost of the kopje ranges was divided from the next range of kopjes by an open space at least 600 yards wide—a space through which the Boers would doubtless find it impossible to charge, but which afforded a good opening for them to shell the centre of the British camp. Nothing that could be devised could keep out the shells; and the opening

"ARTILLERY TO THE FRONT."

for the attack was rendered so much the more favourable because immediately opposite to this open space, and not more than 2,000 yards away from it, was a kopje, flat topped, and offering fine vantage ground for artillery.

There was another weak spot, namely, the rear of the position, which rested on the river. It was impossible, without unduly extending the line, to include the river within the fortifications, and once an enemy could reach the Wepener side of the stream there was nothing to prevent him from bringing a fire to bear on the rear of the British trenches.

Were such an attack made, the southern ridge of kopjes would be the most exposed, and would, no doubt, form the spot selected for the attack. The southern range was, therefore, the post of honour, because it was the post of danger. And Dalgety, who, besides being commander of the whole garrison, was colonel of the Cape Mounted Rifles, selected his own regiment to hold that part of the fortifications. By way of strengthening the position as much as possible, a redoubt was thrown up in the south-west corner. But it was a flimsy work at the best, and would not have stood long against a determined foe.

The commissariat officers and the Medical Staff were scouring the country as widely as they dared go for food and medical comforts. Not a sheep, nor a bullock, nor a pound of coffee was left in Wepener. Everything eatable, right down to tins of sardines, was carried into the fortified camp near Jammers Berg bridge. It should be said that the British paid on a liberal scale for everything thus requisitioned by them from the inhabitants.

The enemy now approached, and on April 5th the pickets and patrols on both sides began to come in touch with each other. The first skirmish occurred on the same day, when a picket of the Cape Mounted Rifles, who had been stationed on observation duty on top of a kopje some distance from Wepener, saw approaching ten men on horseback. As the men drew nearer, it was seen that they carried rifle and bandolier. And as they drew still nearer, the picket saw that they were unmistakably Boers. The Cape Mounted men sat tight, taking care not to show anything above the sky-line. On rode the Boers, straight for the very kopje on which the troopers were lying. It was evidently the intention of the Dutchmen to climb the kopje and take a look round. But they never reached the summit. The sergeant of the picket whispered his men to wait until the enemy should come to a certain spot on the hillside. Then every man should mark his game, and on the word, all should fire at once.

Quite unsuspectingly the Boers rode on, straight at the muzzles of the Lee-Metfords, which the Cape Mounted troopers held at the "present." They were chatting cheerfully, and some of them even smoking. The grim troopers on the summit chuckled. They did not often catch Boers asleep. The Dutchmen arrived at the spot marked out by the sergeant of the picket. "Steady all. Fire."

The words had hardly left the lips of the sergeant of the picket when ten men dropped from their horses. So true had been the aim of the Cape Mounted Rifles that every single Dutchman was killed on the spot. And nobody fired more than one shot. And the troopers of the picket, when they were relieved, swung back into the camp particularly well pleased with themselves.

On the following day (6th), the Boers had approached so near to the British lines

that one of their outposts amused itself by sniping certain British horses that had been turned out on the veldt to feed. Captain Driscoll took out with him a party of his scouts to see what could be done. He soon made up his mind, and as a result of that operation, he hid with his men in a farmhouse close by until the wee small hours of the next morning (7th). Then he led his men quietly out, and the next thing that happened was when five rifles were held at five heads, and five voices quietly murmured "Surrender." At the right end of the rifles were Driscoll's scouts, and the five heads belonged to five of the Boer outpost, who had been amusing themselves all the previous day by sniping at the horses of the Englishmen. Quietly and without fuss the five captives were carried into camp, and the horses in those parts had peace for a time.

That same evening (7th) Driscoll went out again, taking the whole of his scouts. They rode on across the veldt towards the east without adventure, until late at night, when they found a farmhouse at which they slept. But this time the tables were turned; for when day broke the scouts found themselves surrounded by an enemy outnumbering them six to one. Fortunately the farmhouse was a substantial one, and it was surrounded on three sides by a garden; and the garden had a substantial stone wall.

Finding himself surrounded by the enemy, Driscoll took prompt measures for defence. He turned the farmhouse and garden into a fortress by the simple plan of pulling out a few stones and so loop-holing the wall. He felt himself secure after that, unless by chance the enemy brought up artillery. Before the sun had been up very long, the little farmhouse and enclosure began to get lively. Bullets by the hundred struck the wall and became showers of leaden splinters. The scouts, quite snug behind their fortifications, manned the loopholes and fired whenever they saw, or thought they saw, anything worth firing at.

Major Maxwell, of the sappers, heard the noise, and promptly signalled a message to Driscoll to get out of that farmhouse and return to camp. Maxwell thought it was merely one of the scouting captain's dare-devil exploits. He was undeceived when a message came back to this effect:—"We are surrounded. Cannot retire without heavy loss. May we be allowed to defend ourselves here until dark? Then we will try to escape." By this Maxwell knew that Driscoll was in a pretty bad way, and had it not been Driscoll who was there, a relieving force might have been sent. But seeing that it was Driscoll and his dare-devil band, the British commander felt very little anxiety as to their ultimate fate. So he left them there to fight after their own fashion, and to get away as best they could.

If the Dutchmen had been possessed of an ounce of dash they would have rushed the farmhouse by hook or by crook. But they had no stomach for charging up to close quarters, and were content to pot away at the stone walls in the vain hope of being able to pitch a bullet through one of the loop-holes. But, as the Irishman said, it is a very difficult matter to hit a hole, and not a single bullet out of the thousands volleyed from Mauser and Martini did one-pennyworth of damage to the garrison of the farmhouse.

But Driscoll did not escape quite scatheless. He saw a party of Boers working round to a spot which he had hitherto contrived to keep clear. It was by this route, in fact, that he intended to escape during

the night. Wherefore he thought it wise to send out a small party to keep the way open. The handful of scouts galloped out, dismounted, and skirmished forward, firing, and wriggling along in the dust, and generally demeaning themselves as was their wont. But the Dutchmen were too many for them. The ground was almost bare of cover, and fifty rifles swept it. And very much to their disgust, the little party had to retire. The Boers followed them up, and kept up such a tremendous fusillade that the scouts had to leave their horses and make their way back to the farmhouse on foot.

But no sooner were they in the enclosure than they volunteered to go out and fetch their horses back. They vowed that they would never leave their nags to become the property of a lot of blanky Dutchmen. Driscoll was not disposed to run too much risk in order to save the horses, though he knew that, on the other hand, if he did not save them, his escape would be rendered more difficult. Therefore, though he would in no ways allow a considerable party to go out and risk themselves, he permitted them to cast lots and select three for the job.

The three borrowed from their comrades a horse apiece, and galloped like the wind to the place where their chargers had been left tethered. For half a mile they were under fire at no more than 600 yards range. But by dint of galloping hard, and by bending low over the saddles, and swerving every now and then, they contrived to reach their goal untouched. Then they began to drive the rescued horses in before them, and, of necessity, were compelled to go a little slower. The half-mile of danger had barely been re-entered when one of the gallant three dropped from his horse with a groan. One of the others immediately stopped, and, regardless of bullets, dismounted, hoisted

A TYPICAL BIVOUAC.

the stricken man to his own saddle bow, and thus encumbered, made for the farm-house again.

The Boers seemed to be shooting better now, for about half a minute later one of them put a bullet through one of the recovered horses. Down dropped the poor brute mortally wounded. The two sound men and their wounded comrade herded in the rest of the horses, and plying the whip amongst them after the manner of Australian stockdrivers, rounded them up and drove them at full gallop into the farm enclosure. Then another trooper rose and swore by all that was blue that he would not give the Dutchmen an ounce of loot; therefore he must go out and strip the shot horse of its accoutrements. It was a mad thing to do, but he did it. Choosing a fleet horse, he galloped out into the thick of the bullets—rode quite a quarter of a mile across the sights of fifty rifles—calmly dismounted, stripped the horse of harness and accoutrements, hoisted them on the back of his own charger, and galloped back. Thousands of bullets ploughed the ground around his horse's hoofs and whistled past his ears, but not one found a billet in him, and he re-entered the farm enclosure quite untouched and as cool as a cucumber, having first waved his plumed hat defiantly at the baffled sharpshooters.

The man wounded in rescuing the horses was the only casualty sustained by the scouts from some fourteen hours of constant volleying and sniping; nor was any horse touched, except the one which the daring trooper had stripped of its saddle. The Boers did not escape quite so easily. There were sharpshooters amongst Driscoll's Scouts, and man for man they shot a hundred per cent. better than their opponents. About twenty Boers were hit, but how many of these were killed and how many wounded it is impossible to say.

Night came at last, and under cover of the friendly darkness Driscoll led his scouts out of their impromptu fortress, crept through the Boer lines, and before day-break reached the camp of Colonel Dalgety in safety.

That camp was now not on the Wepener side of the Caledon, but on the western side; in fact, the army had been removed into the position which Maxwell was making ready. We have said that the whole army had been removed—that is a slight mistake; the 1st Regiment of Brabant's Horse, the corps which under Captain Goddard had first occupied Wepener town, was still in possession of that town. They had been out early on the morning of the 9th, and returned to Wepener at 6.30 a.m. The troopers had just received the word to "Off saddle," when there dropped, apparently out of the skies, three shells; it was no longer "Off saddle," it was "Mount and ride."

At a hand gallop Brabant's Horse thundered through the street in Wepener, and were not long before they learned what they had long suspected, that the pious burghers who had brought out elephant guns and Sniders, swearing these to be their only weapons, had lied most deliberately. The muzzles of Mauser rifles and Martinis peeped from windows, and many a pious oath-taker drew trigger on Goddard, a man whose great fault was that he had treated these very men much better than they deserved. The troopers failed not to take note of these snipers, and vowed to have revenge when their turn came again.

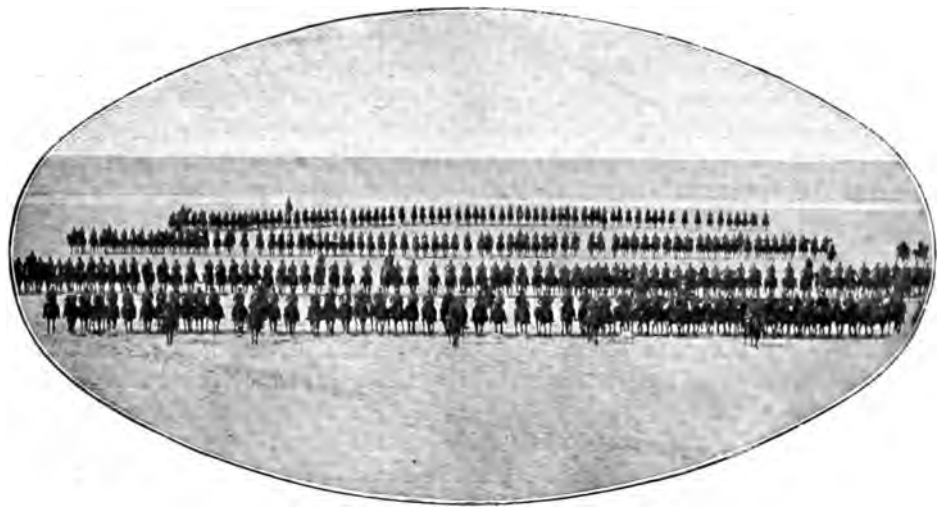
To say sooth, the 1st Brabant's Horse were in a position of very considerable

danger. In order to reach the main body, they had to cross the Jammers Berg bridge, and then, wheeling to the right, cross a piece of perfectly open ground ; and with their usual kindly forethought, the Boers had prepared accordingly. Like a whirlwind the horsemen galloped over the bridge. Three Boer gunners, with guns trained on the piece of level ground aforesaid, prepared to belch forth shrapnel. Five hundred riflemen, carefully concealed in places whence they could sweep that same piece of level ground, charged the magazines of their rifles, and noted that they were sighted up to the proper distance.

But Goddard, of Brabant's Horse, was not a blunderer. As soon as the leading files crossed the bridge, his voice rang out, "Left wheel." And with bloody spur the squadrons wheeled to the left and thundered along the bank. The Boer gunners hastily heaved their pieces round. Too late! The Boer riflemen, with rifles sighted to 1,200 yards, found themselves still more awkwardly placed. For they were lying crouched on the very ground towards which Goddard led his men. Hastily the burghers tried to calculate the distance and readjust their sights. Too late! Long ere their nervous fingers could do their office, down on the very top of them thundered the squadrons of Captain Goddard.

Some of the Dutchmen contrived to draw trigger. But they hit no one. The gunners only managed to slue their pieces round when Brabant's Horse were mixed up with the Boer marksmen, and the pom-pom shells and the shrapnel with which they pursued the galloping Colonials did no damage except to their own men. The 1st Brabant's Horse had a narrow squeak ; and there can be no doubt that if their leader had not kept his head as he did, they would have been simply cut to pieces.

The siege of Wepener had begun.



THE NEW ZEALAND CONTINGENT.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

THE SIEGE OF WEPENER.

IT is called officially the Siege of Wepener, and unofficially also. But, as a matter of fact, Wepener itself was never besieged. The place that was besieged was the position we have described—a series of ranges of kopjes about nine miles in extent, situate on the bank of the Caledon river, opposite to the town of Wepener, and hard by the Jammers Berg bridge. When the 1st Brabant's Horse arrived here they found a battle in full progress.

The fighting began in the north-west, where the Kaffrarian Rifles with three guns held a range of kopjes just above the spot where the River Caledon bends.

On this position, hastily fortified, the Boers poured a tremendous fire from rifles and heavy cannon, as well as from one of those supremely irritating pom-poms.

But the garrison speedily discovered that the Boers had found out the weak part of their position—namely, the part held by the Cape Mounted Rifles on the south-west. Upon this range of kopjes the full fury of the attack developed, and before a quarter of an hour had passed a dozen men of the Cape Mounted Rifles were lying dead or wounded behind the half-built sangars.

At the extreme west corner of this range were some semi-detached kopjes ; and here the losses were heavy from the outset. The Cape Mounted Rifles responded gallantly to the fire, but two pom-poms and a Maxim gun kept up a continuous and accurate fire upon them. And not only from the front did the bullets come. On the heights beyond the river were numbers of burghers who kept up a long

sniping rifle fire. Men dropped quickly ; and Dalgety saw that he must throw reinforcements into the position.

He first sent Driscoll's Scouts, who were in the centre camp and had to cross open ground exposed to the full fury of the Dutchman's fire. With their captain leading, the scouts galloped across to the threatened post ; galloped in a long line with plenty of space between the files. But so open were they to the fire of the enemy that before they had crossed the 600 yards of open ground they lost one killed and ten wounded.

Even with the reinforcements—and it must be borne in mind that Driscoll's Scouts, though few in number, were probably the most valuable of all the troops in the camp for a job of this kind—the Cape Mounted Rifles found themselves hard pressed. The pom-poms showered shells into the kopjes unremittingly. The defenders hardly dared to raise themselves from the ground to fire, so terrible was the cross-fire.

Dalgety decided to send more reinforcements. So he ordered Captain Steele to take his company of Royal Scots to strengthen the position. The Scots had to cross the same exposed place as the scouts had done. They galloped for all they were worth, but they, too, in running the gauntlet lost heavily—two killed and ten wounded out of a total of seventy-five. Still the defence of the southern ridge was not strong enough, and again reinforcements were sent, this time a squadron of the 1st Brabant's Horse, and later in the day, half a squadron of the 2nd Brabant's Horse.

Fast and furious the battle raged. The garrison of the southern ridge had to face the most determined attack. The Boers, finding that they had some advantage, crept closer and closer along the broken ground in front of the position. At one time it seemed as though they must break in. But the Cape Mounted Rifles and the scouts and the rest of the defenders fought as men fight who have made up their minds that they may be killed but will never yield. Gradually they found the best places for cover, and once they had settled down they showed the Boer marksmen what musketry really was. So deadly accurate was their shooting that after six hours of combat they drove the Dutchmen back from their advanced positions, with the loss of about forty men, nearly every one of whom was shot through the head.

On the other side of the battle the assailants tried to capture the Jammers Berg bridge, and it must be said that their attack was as determined as it well could be. The Kaffrarian Rifles turned their Maxim on the approach to the bridge, and having got the range swept the ground with showers of bullets. The rifles of this fine corps also spoke determinedly and, despite every exertion of obstinate valour, the Dutchmen could not rush the coveted position. For hours fire ran along the whole line, and it was well for Britain that day that she was served by men of stark obstinacy and supreme coolness and courage.

In no part of the battle were the British so superior as in the quality of their artillery practice. The Dutchmen had mounted three guns on the flat-topped kopje alluded to in the last chapter. From these they poured through the gap in the British position a terrific rain of shells. They commanded the interior of Dalgety's fortifications—that is, the hollow of the horse shoe. Here the waggons were laagered up, and the stores were piled ; and the Boer shrapnel played incessantly upon the laager.

But the Dutch gunners—mostly foreign, by the way—met more than their match when they tackled the volunteer artillerists under Captain Lukin, of the Cape Mounted Rifles. As soon as the Boers exposed the positions of their guns, the British gunners marked the various spots and proceeded to try to silence their opponents. Lukin galloped about from gun to gun, shouting encouragement here, giving directions there. Every time he urged his horse across the plain that stretched from the north to the south of the position, he was the target for a hundred marksmen. But he seemed to bear a charmed life. Others who ventured into that fiery space came near to death. Maxwell, of the sappers, who rode from point to point, trying to strengthen the defences, had his pony shot under him. Colonel Dalgety's horse was also shot ; but Lukin, man and horse, escaped without a scratch. Which shows how largely death and wounds are a matter of luck.

By the time the sun was at its height every rifle on both sides was hot with firing. The garrison on the south still sustained the brunt of the attack ; and at about 1 p.m. Captain Goldsworthy, of the Cape Mounted Rifles, was badly wounded. Four of his men picked him up, laid him on a stretcher and bore him towards the hospital, which was in one of the houses belonging to the flour mill near the river. Walking across the plain the bearers found themselves the target of many scores of rifles, and this although they were obviously engaged in a work of mercy and carried the Red Cross flag. Suddenly, one of the bearers stumbled and fell. He thought at first that he was wounded, but he had only been hit by a spent bullet. Still, it was enough to frighten him, and it did frighten him ; and setting down his burden, he bolted to cover. Two others, infected by his fear, also bolted ; but the fourth bearer, whose name was Washington, remained by his wounded captain, and shouted for the others to return. After a few minutes the three

M. SAMUEL LÉON, THE CELEBRATED GUNNER OF "LONG TOM."

runaways, astounded with themselves and thoroughly ashamed of having run away, came back, and the stretcher resumed its journey. Bullets passed between the legs of the men and threw up little splashes of dust all round them. Yet, marvellous to relate, they escaped whole. But the men of the Cape Mounted Rifles had seen the stretcher-bearers and their wounded captain heartlessly fired on, and they swore revenge.

They soon had their chance. A Boer fell near the southern ridge, and five of his comrades came out to fetch him in. Every man of the five fell to the vengeful bullets of the Cape Mounted Rifles. Five more ventured out. Brabant's Horse turned their Maxim round and mowed down four of them, and then the troopers called it evens and allowed the wounded Boer to be taken into his lines.

The conduct of the Colonials in shooting men who went out to carry in a wounded man was, doubtless, incapable of justification. But it is not so certain that there was no excuse for their barbarity. A score of times during the campaign the Boers had fired on the Red Cross flag, and the British troopers, thoroughly maddened by continued barbarities of the burghers, thought to teach them a salutary lesson by the ancient method of retaliation. "An eye for an eye," cruelty for cruelty, is neither Christian nor civilised. But can it be wondered at that men adopt such methods in the heat of deadly conflict, and under the severest kind of provocation?

Terrible, indeed, was the situation of the men who held the southern defences. The lower schanzes, in particular, were exposed to a tremendous fusillade; and in endeavouring to subdue the fire of the Boer marksmen the garrison of these schanzes spent every cartridge. There was a waggon with reserve ammunition about 250 yards behind—under the shelter of the redoubt; but to reach it meant running the gauntlet of a short-range fire.

Still, six heroes of the Cape Mounted Rifles volunteered to run the risk, and the officer in command was obliged to let them go or else give up the defence. Stripping themselves of all weight, the six crawled out of the trench, then jumped up, and ran up the slope. Pelted at all the way, they managed to reach the redoubt unhurt. Here they rested awhile, preparatory to another spurt to the ammunition waggon. This also they reached unhurt.

Then the dangerous part of their task began. Seizing a box of ammunition, each man headed straight for the lower schanzes. But it was not easy to run carrying such a load. They came to the redoubt again in safety, and, after a short breathing-space, bolted out and ran down the slope. Their comrades saw them coming, and cheered. The Boers also saw them, and hurled a blinding shower of lead at them. A shriek of agony, the death-cry of a hero. One of the six has it in the stomach, and is rolling over and over on the slope.

There is no time to succour him. Speed, you five heroes. Another down; another; a fourth falls; and a fifth. But the one who is left never flinches. On he races, daring death a hundred times in a stride. A shout of triumph ascends above the din of the firing—a welcome to the hero who stumbles, exhausted but unhurt, into the trench, bearing his precious burden. But on the slopes are five brown heaps. Five men. Five comrades. It were more prudent to leave them there.

"Leave them—no, by God!" And half a dozen men bound out of the schanze and dart up the hillside. And the rest fire vicious volleys at the foe below, for they

have cartridges now. By the mercy of the Most Merciful the rescuers reach their comrades and bear them back to cover—one corpse and four wounded men. Nor, being practical men, do they forget to bring also the five boxes of ammunition. By many an act the Cape Mounted Rifles deserved well of their country; but no deed brought more glory on the men who did it and on the corps to which they belonged than the carriage of the ammunition on the first day of the siege of Wepener.

Except for about half an hour in the early afternoon, when the Boers themselves seemed to tire, firing continued at high pressure all day. Close on five o'clock, however, one of the 12-pounders administered a knock-out blow to a big gun of the besiegers; and at about 5.30 the Dutch gunners ceased from troubling. Whereat the British gunners crowed; for it was first point to them.

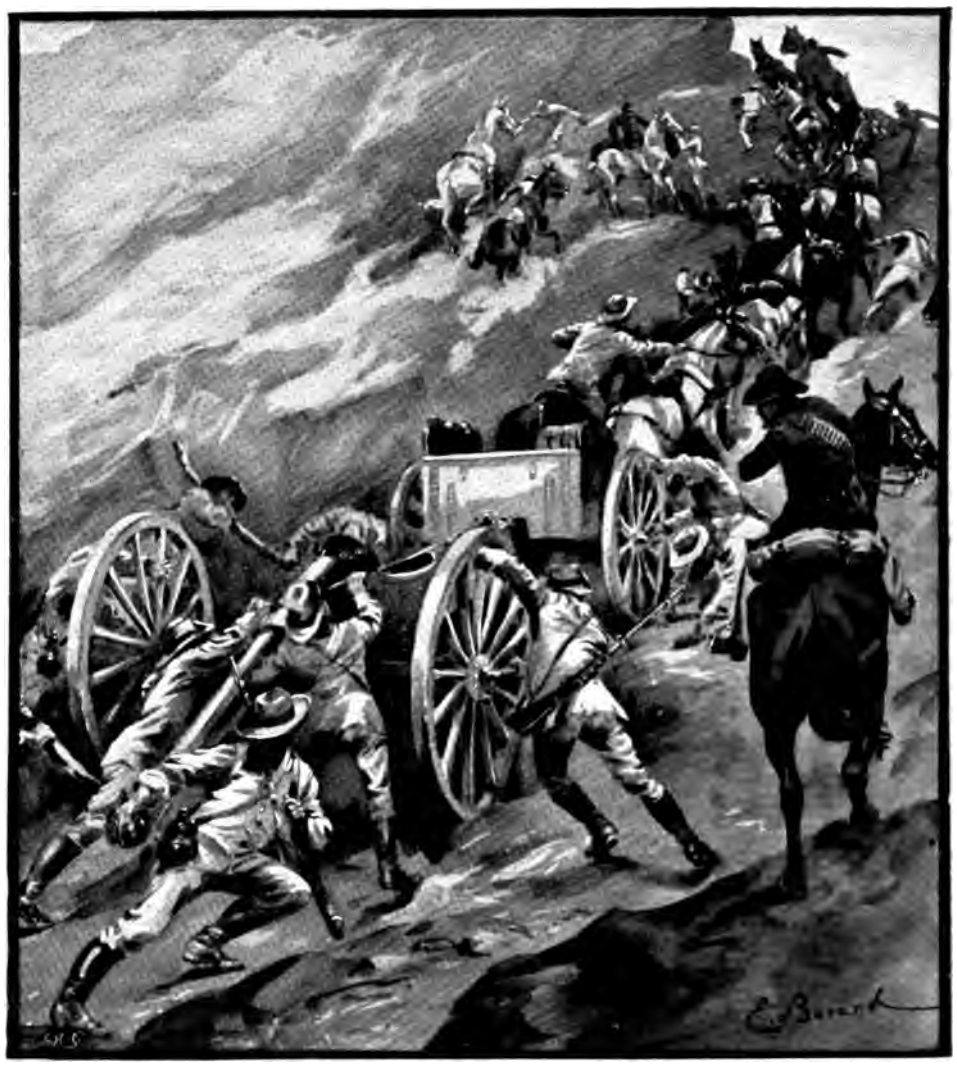
But the rifle-fire never slackened for a moment—not even when the sun set. By the uncertain light of the moon the musketry continued. Still, the Colonials did not take much notice of the nocturnal sniping. A few men kept their rifles in hand and fired across at the foe; but the greater part of the force spent the night in strengthening the defences of the place. The existing schanzes and sangars were improved, and new ones hastily thrown up; and with pick and shovel the Cape Mounted Rifles finished some rifle-pits that had already been begun.

In the centre of the position another scene was enacted. A donga, of irregular shape, deep, with almost perpendicular sides, wriggled through the plain near the flour mill; and here the cooks wrought manfully. They had hollowed out ovens in the sides of the nullah; and, fuel being plentiful, they baked great hunks of sheep and bullock; and made bread for the fighting men. The donga afforded splendid shelter from the hostile shells; and during the whole of the siege the cooks laboured in security—a matter of much importance to the garrison.

And surgeons were busy. Forty-nine men were already in the hospital—a large number. But not every man whom a bullet struck went into the shelter of the extemporised hospital. Many there were with flesh wounds—and pretty bad ones, too, some of them—who betook themselves to the doctor with: "Tie this up, please, doctor. And be quick, I'm wanted back at the trenches." As for those who had merely been grazed by bullets, they never even took the trouble to ask for surgical aid. They tied a handkerchief round, to soak up the blood, and grimly fought.

They were a wonderful lot, these men of the Colonial Division. True, they lacked the perfect discipline of a regiment of regulars. Nor were any of them, perhaps, to be compared to the Canadian regiment or the C.I.V. But they were as bold a lot of guerilla warriors as could be found from Dan to Beersheba. Some of them were South-African born; a few were Americans—cheerful fellows who fought for the pure pleasure of fighting; a few were—goodness knows of what nationality. But most of them were young Britons, born and bred in the tight little island. Not forgetting the Irish. Naturally they were at the place where heads were to be broken.

Let heaven and earth witness—the Irishman is not a quarrelsome man. He is the most peaceable fellow in the world. Yet whoever heard of a war for the last 800 years or more that lacked its Irishman? The light-hearted boys who had come from



"THE DUTCHMEN HAD LABOURED ALSO" (*p.* 901).

Galway and Tipperary, from Limerick and Sligo, from Derry and Cork were worth a squadron apiece. At least, such is the testimony of an English officer who was there. "Nothing," said he, "could lower their spirits. They shouted out 'chaff' and jest in the thickest of the battle; they cheered the wounded. In fact, to use a hackneyed phrase, they were 'the life and soul of the garrison.'"

See that man with a month-old beard; long-limbed, bronzed, erect. He was a server-out of "Cape Smoke" in his capacity of barman at somebody's liquor store up country. He was also, before that, the best fielder in the Eton eleven. There's

another—heaving at a stone ; to look at him you would not think that only one life stands between him and a seat on the red benches of the House of Lords. All sorts and conditions of men are here—rovers and fighters.

Daylight (April 10th) saw the garrison in a much better plight for defence by reason of their all-night labours. It also saw them under a worse cross-fire. For the Dutchmen had laboured also, and had moved a gun to the Wepener side of the Caledon, with which they were able to shell the open part of the British position. When the moon set and ere the sun had risen, numbers of Boers swam and waded the river, and took cover on the British side ; whence they could snipe even more effectively than before.

The Kaffrarian Rifles had now a large force on their right rear ; and the 2nd Regiment of Brabant's Horse, whose mission it was to hold the river, found the snipers on the hither bank a very rock of offence. The C.M.R., too, were under fire before sunrise ; and by 6 a.m. the whole rear of the position was subjected to a continuous fusillade of musketry. Ere long shrapnel began again to burst over the sangars—this time from rear as well as front. For the Boers, having got a large number of men across the stream, covered the crossing of more artillery.

To this concentrated cannonade, Lukin's gunners did not fail to respond with spirit ; and from early morning until far on into the evening they hurled shells at the enemy's gunners. The livelong day the air was filled with the shriek of shells and the whistling of bullets. The heavy artillery boomed continuously. Rifles never ceased their cracking. The postman's knock of three Boer pom-poms deafened the ear. But again, late in the afternoon, the British gunners silenced the Transvaal artillerists.

The expenditure of ammunition was enormous ; and in the afternoon the Cape Mounted Rifles began to run short of cartridges. It was no easy matter to cross the plain and fetch up boxes of ammunition from the stores, for the plain was simply raked by the Maxims and the rifles of the Dutchmen. And again valuable lives were lost in taking the supplies to the men in the schanzes. This day (April 10th), as Major Sprenger of the Cape Mounted Rifles was carrying cartridges to his men, he was compelled to expose himself. Instantly a hundred rifles were aimed at him, and he fell without a groan. He had been pierced through and through—not by one bullet, but by twenty.

After sundown the garrison had rest for an hour or two, until about 7.30 p.m. Then there burst upon the southern ridge the most blasting hail of bullets that had yet struck the position. The Dutchmen had been reinforced by a considerable body—about 2,000 men—under De Wet, fresh from the capture of the Irish Rifles. And it speedily became apparent that the new men were bent on playing the bold game. They sent in the moonlight two parties of riflemen close up to either flank of the southern ridge, while a smaller body of picked men to the number of about 200 stole up in front to storm the schanzes where the Cape Mounted Rifles and the Royal Scots and Driscoll's Scouts were entrenched.

Whilst the flanking parties fired withering and incessant volleys into the entrenchments from right and left, the stormers crept forward with great skill. There was plenty of cover for them on the hillside ; and the defenders had quite

enough to do to deal with the riflemen on the flanks. And thus it came to pass that the storming party crept up to within fifty yards of the advanced trenches of the Colonials. But at this moment Major Waring, the officer in command of the southern defences, looked out to see what was going on, and he espied the brown figures stealthily approaching.

His voice rose sharp and clear. "Fix bayonets!" Steel clashed on steel as the men obeyed the order. The Boers heard the ominous sound, and halted. Then there broke from the throat of the defenders a fierce British cheer. It clove the din defiantly, and again the Dutchmen heard. "They have seen us. They will charge down hill upon us with their dreadful knives. Run!" And with one cry of fear the stormers turned and fled, nor looked behind them. As they fled the British riflemen stood up in the trenches and let them have it. The light was none too good for marksmanship; but of that storming party forty were carried down the hill by their comrades—some of them never to fight more.

The assault had failed, though it had been perilously near succeeding; but the fire from the flanking parties continued until nearly midnight. And the Colonials and the diminished handful of Scots needed all the cover they could get. And when the attack died away, bullets from occasional snipers still sputtered round the schanzes. There was no rest for officer or man that night; for the defences were still incomplete, and night was the only time it was possible to work to strengthen them. So the troopers and the handful of sappers laboured as navvies until an hour before daylight: then for a short sleep before the day's fighting.

Wednesday (11th April) saw another new development. The Boers dragged three guns, one of them a pom-pom, up to the very summit of Jammers Berg, whence they opened fire in the early morning upon the Cape Mounted Rifles and their comrades of the southern defences. One of the naval 12-pounders dealt with them somewhat, and afterwards a 15-pounder helped. But this day Lukin's gunners were unable to silence their rivals, and all day long the big guns pounded one another. There was this much relief, however, afforded to the garrison, that the rifles of the besiegers were practically silent. There was no sustained musketry—nothing but an occasional sniping shot which did no damage.

The defenders, weary and worn with continual fighting and trenchmaking for two days and nights, composed themselves to sleep, all except the gunners and one or two sharpshooters who tried to get even with the Boer snipers. Cannon roared and shrapnel shrieked and burst around them; but the Colonials slept on, as only men can sleep who have wrought manfully.

It was well they did sleep; for when the sun set, the rains descended and the floods came and filled the trenches to the brim. And, to add to the irksomeness, Dalgety deemed it wise to keep all the men under arms. He knew that a stormy night is the best for an attack on a fortified position, and he wanted to be ready. As it turned out, the precaution was wasted; yet it was a proper precaution to take.

The next day was a repetition of Wednesday—shrapnel, pom-poms, and snipers; very little damage done, except to the transport waggons.

But the night had another tale to tell.

There crept into the British lines early in the evening a Basuto—friendly, as all

Basutos were, to the soldiers of the Great White Queen. And he told how he had been scouting in the very laagers of the Dutchmen ; how he heard them talking—talking of an attack to be made that very night on the positions held by the Cape Mounted Rifles and by the 2nd Brabant's Horse ; also, the Basuto related how the burghers were daily increasing in numbers, so that they were now in twice the strength they had been when the siege began.

The bold troopers were in nowise dismayed, either by the prospect of a night attack or by the news of the increase in the number of their foes. They were, in fact, as cool as cucumbers, and to this they owed their salvation.

All that night (12th–13th) the men in the trenches stood under arms. The rain was pelting down in torrents. The pickets in the front trenches peered into the night ; for if there was anything to be feared it was that the Dutchmen would creep up to point-blank range unseen, and on such a stormy night they might well steal close up unseen and unheard. When midnight came, and there were still no signs of an attack, the British began to think that their friendly Basuto had played a trick on them ; but the officers still kept their men under arms. Hark ! the tramp of feet below. The spy has not played us false, and, thanks to his timely warning, we are ready.

At 1.30 a.m. the attack came. Clouds obscured the moon for minutes together, but in the darkness the men on the western defences and the men on the south could hear the rumble of a large body of troops getting nearer and nearer. Orders were given in whispers, and passed along from man to man, from trench to trench. "Magazine volleys!" Every man settled down. Shadowy forms could be seen in the half-light, rushing closer and closer.

"They make no noise now. Curse them ! They have taken their boots off, every man of them. Ready, the Cape Mounted Rifles ! Ready, Brabant's Horse ! Ready, the Scouts ! Ready, the Scots !" The creeping forms in front spring up and rush in silence at the trenches. Two hundred yards—one hundred—a whistle's shriek pierces the still night air, and on the sound there bursts from trench and gun pit a withering, blasting volley ; then a shout, and the Boers know the surprise has failed. Bless that Basuto spy ! he has a white heart under a black skin.

Down go the Dutchmen to earth—some lifeless, some wounded, the rest falling flat to avoid the British fire. Reinforcements hurry up to support the attack, and at distances varying from 700 to 100 yards fire on the parapets of the trenches as they alone can fire. And now there wages a fight the deadliest yet waged since the siege began. Hillside and trench run with blood, and as the moon comes out from behind the clouds her soft rays show men writhing in agony, and forms that once were men.

With obstinate courage the Dutchmen creep up to the trenches, covered by their musketry. With equal tenacity the British stand their ground. The outermost trench on the southern ridge is held by a small party of the C.M.R., and these are exposed to the fullest fury of the attack. At last—the time being about 3 a.m.—a party of about fifty Boers, having crept up to within a hundred yards, pour in withering volleys, then rise and rush at the trench. Right valiantly the dozen Colonials who are able to handle a gun, fire into the assailants, and bring down man after man. But the odds are

too great. Despite all that the Colonials can do, about twenty burly farmers leap into the trench.

Behind this trench is another, holding a dozen of the Royal Scots, to whom comes running one of the C.M.R. "The first trench is lost!" he cries; "the Boers are in." A harsh voice speaks, a voice bearing the burr of the North Briton: "We must clear them out. Fix bayonets. Royal Scots—charge!" Now the Royal Scots are the proudest of all the infantry of the line, for their regiment is none other than the First Foot—the premier infantry, save the Guards, of the British army. The handful of men do not wait to ask the number of their foes. They throw the deadly steel on the barrels of their rifles, and bound forward to the attack.

"At them, the Scots! If they be not peremptorily dislodged from this foothold the whole position is lost."

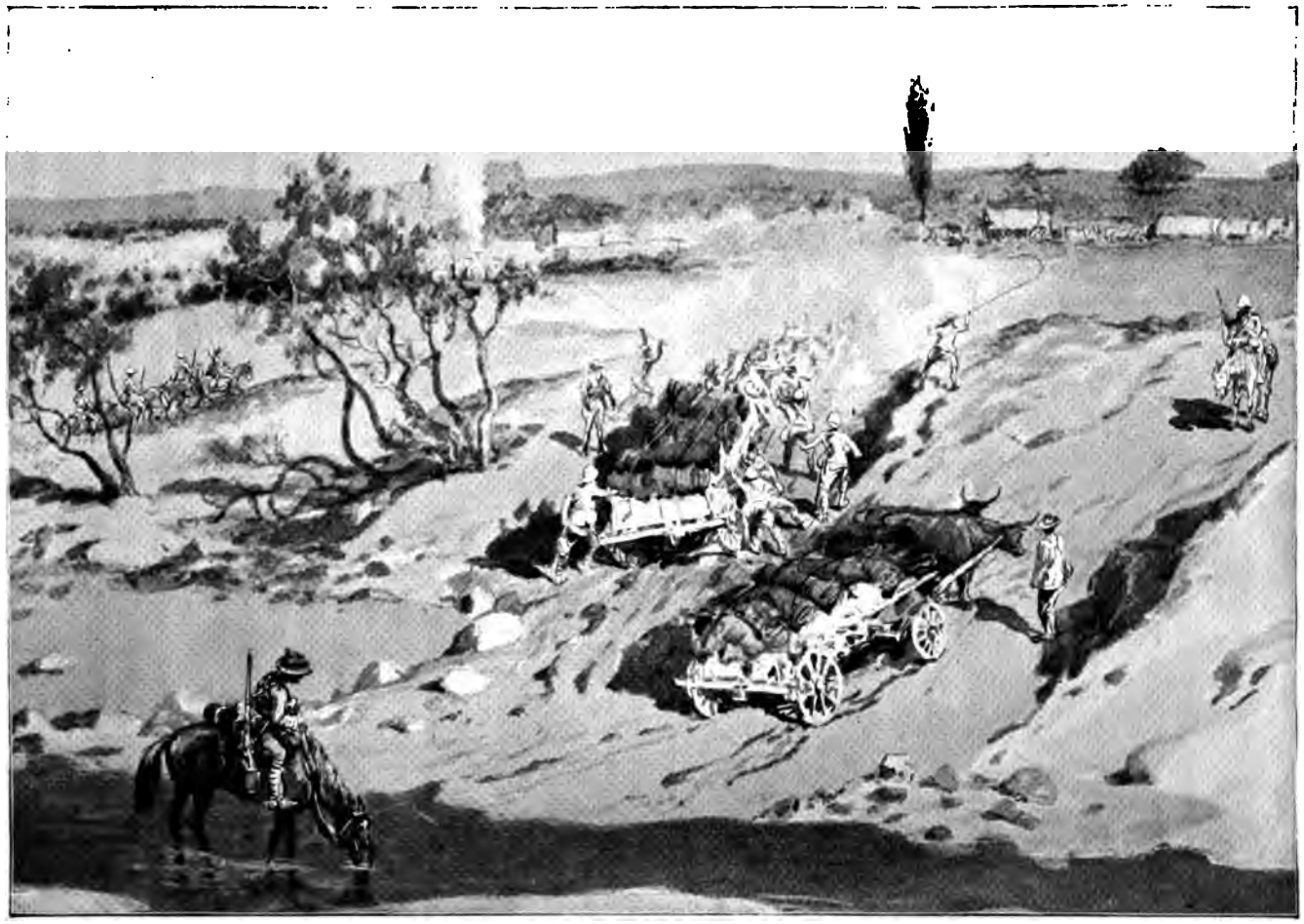
Like an avalanche the little line hurls itself down the hill at the double. With a shout the men leap into the trench. Bravely the Dutchmen snap the triggers of their rifles, then club their guns and fight hand to hand. But who shall stay the steel in such hands? In three minutes the trench is cleared; and when daylight comes fifteen dead bodies are found, every one of them marked with that terrible gash in back and front which is the hall-mark of the British soldier's work.

After this, there is no more hand-to-hand fighting: only a continuous and blighting fire of musketry all round. The Cape Rifles are not the only troops to be assailed. True, they have the position most open to attack, and in consequence have to bear the brunt of it. The Kaffrarian Rifles, at the opposite end of the position, are assaulted also; but they have better shelter, and never let their opponents get nearer than 700 yards. And Colonel Grenfell and the 2nd Brabant's Horse, who have to cope with the efforts of a third body of assailants, mow down the first to advance in such style that those behind are not eager to come on.

All night long the firing continues; nor do the Boers draw off until daylight. Then they retire, sullenly and with reluctance, and the victory is to the Colonial Division. The losses of the defenders have been slight, except amongst the Cape Mounted Rifles; but that gallant regiment is consoled by the fact that all round its position the enemy's dead lie thick. In truth, the Colonials have inflicted upon the burghers some of the severest punishment meted out to them since the war broke out; and the Dutchmen are beginning to learn that these men can neither be surprised nor intimidated. And the garrison is amply repaid for its sacrifices by the soldierly "Well done, men," of Colonel Dalgety.

That officer takes advantage of a cloudless morning to heliograph to Aliwal a message to relieve the minds of Brabant and Lord Roberts. "Going strong," he reports. And he was right. The garrison was indeed "going strong." As for the the enemy, they spent the early part of Friday (13th) in removing their wounded, after which they indulged in more shrapnel and rifle firing, varied by pom-poms. Four of the guns of the U Battery, R.H.A., lost during the disastrous day of the Koorn Spruit fight, were amongst the artillery used against the Colonials; but the cannonade, though directed well enough, did little damage.

It had been, in fact, one of the experiences of the war—the infinitesimal losses inflicted by artillery fire upon men under cover. It seemed as though Lord



AT A RIVER DRIFT.

Wolseley's axiom—that artillery is more terrifying than destructive—was true. In any case, of the hundred or more killed and wounded in the defence of Wepener during the first week of the siege not more than half a dozen owed their hurt to shell fire.

Rain had begun to fall on the afternoon of the 12th, and it never ceased until the 16th. All day the British stood up to their knees in water; at night they bivouacked in pools. Not that anybody had very much sleep at all. For the lines were necessarily so extensive that every soldier was required to man the trenches. There could be no relays—one party resting while the others watched and fought.

The rain not only filled the trenches, but also the dongas where the horses were standing sheltered from shell-fire; and before the four days were over the poor brutes had to swim for it more than once. It also flooded the great donga in the centre of the position, and spoiled tons of stores, so that the men were reduced to bully beef and hard biscuits.

It was during the flood that half a dozen troopers volunteered for one of those exploits so characteristic of the born soldier. The mill near Jammers Berg bridge was a water mill, and had, naturally, been stopped when the shells began to fly. Some of the Boer marksmen had crept into a sluice, which formed for them a first-rate, ready-made trench whence they annoyed the *verdomde rooibaatjes* exceedingly, both by day and night.

The position had been marked by the British; and one night some half a dozen troopers volunteered to swim the river and open the mill-race which dammed up the waters and left the sluice dry. Permission was readily accorded; and when the night was at its darkest and the rain at its heaviest, a few naked men plunged into the Caledon and paddled quietly to the eastern shore. Nobody saw them, and in a few minutes they were at the mill-race.

The marksmen were sleeping quietly after a hard day's shooting—sleeping the well-earned sleep of men who have toiled all day. Did they dream, one wonders, of home—of the old farmhouse; of the wife or maiden at the dorp; of the time when, the *rooineks* having been exterminated, Katty would welcome them back? Or did they dream of the wrath to come? Little did they know how near they were to solving the mysteries of life and death.

A roar like thunder awakens them. In the dim light they see a dark wall, speckled with white, rushing upon them. They spring to their feet, but ere they can turn to flee the flood knocks them down, picks them up, swirls them round, dashes them hither and thither. Shrieks pierce the night; then stillness reigns—the awful stillness of death.

And half a dozen naked forms presently emerge from the water and clamber up the western bank. "I don't think any of *that* lot will snipe any more," says one, as he sticks a pipe between his chattering teeth. "I guess not," replied the American; "seemed to me some of 'em couldn't swim."

Shortly after midnight on Sunday (15th)—or, to be more exact, at about 1 a.m. on the 16th—a tremendous fusillade startled the camp. The Boers, led by De Wet, had sent another storming party; but this time they avoided the southern defences and the Cape Mounted Rifles. They made their chief attack on the posts held by Brabant's Horse (1st regiment). They found Captain Goddard not unready. On Sunday several Basutos had crept into the British lines and informed Dalgety that an assault was to be made that night; and he had been able to take his precautions accordingly.

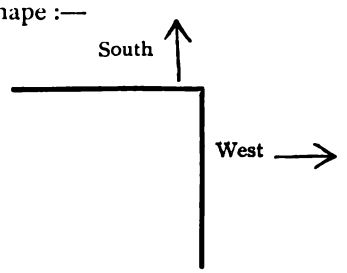
The Boers came up in their old style—gliding from rock to rock, from boulder to boulder, noiseless and almost invisible. But not quite. The 1st Brabant's who were in the advance trenches saw them well enough, and passed the word to their comrades behind. No commands were given; but every trooper had his magazine charged, and the cut-off opened. "Surely," said the Boers, "a deep sleep has been cast over the worn-out *verdomdes*. Up, ye burghers, and smite them hip and thigh!"

At about 250 yards from the foremost trench the stormers rose and rushed headlong. There were Boers and men of the foreign legion, Blake's brigade and Germans, a Frenchman or two, and more than one renegade Englishman. There were burghers who had sworn but a week or two before never again to bear arms in the campaign. In the sin of their perjury they perished. For scarcely had they risen for the storming than a whistle blew; and there poured into the motley ranks a tornado of lead that mowed them down like a scythe. The stormers paused, aghast. A voice shouts, "Fix bayonets!" Three hundred voices shouted the fierce "Hurrah!" that has prefaced so many deeds of valour and of blood; and the Dutchmen turned and fled, their discomfiture completed by the cheer of the British men. Winged messengers of death pursued them down the hill. A burly Dutchman runs panting. He is an old man to be engaged in such work as this. A crack from up the hill, a twinkling flash, and the stout burgher pitches head foremost, shivering his skull against a boulder. A farm at Rouxville has lost its master. Shouts of agony resound over the mountain, and in Jaal and German, in Dutch, and French, and English. And ever from the trenches pours a ceaseless stream of lead. The Englishmen have stopped shouting now—they are killing.

This was the last of the desperate attempts made by the commandoes to storm the heights of Wepener by night. Every time they had approached the trenches they had lost heavily, while the losses of the garrison had been slight. On this occasion not a single one of Brabant's Horse had been touched.

But the siege was by no means over; nor was the position of Dalgety and his force an enviable one. The openness of the rear enabled the Transvaal gunners to smash the trek oxen and the draught and cavalry horses wherever they were placed; and at the end of the first week the air reeked with the stench of rotting carcases. To send men to bury the dead beasts would only have been to throw lives away, and lives could not be spared. So the garrison bore this hardship as they bore every other—cheerfully and uncomplainingly; satisfied if only they could hold at bay the armies of the foe.

On Monday (16th) the Dutchmen played a game far more dangerous to the British than any they had before attempted. In the night they had moved a gun to a position only 1,000 yards distant from a redoubt occupied by Driscoll's Scouts and some of Brabant's 2nd Regiment, and opened on it with common shell. Now the redoubt formed the angle of the defences at the south-west, and was in this shape:—



THE FIELD HOSPITAL AT WORK.

The shelling started at 10 a.m., and by 10.15 the southern wall of the redoubt was smashed to pieces. It was not an earthwork but a stone work, built of loose boulders ; and the falling stones injured many men in the trench behind. Driscoll, who was in command, ordered all the men into the trench behind the western wall, and made them lie flat. They were so close-packed, however, that they had to lie on top of one another. Presently, down went the western sangar as flat as the walls of Jericho. Twelve hundred Boer marksmen were lying near their gun, snugly concealed and waiting for the *rooineks* to rise from the redoubt and run to cover, in which case every one of the twelve hundred would have let loose his rifle.

But the defenders were not foolish enough to get up and run. They knew perfectly well what was in store for them if they did ; and they preferred to take their chance of the bursting shells rather than that of being shot like rabbits bolting from a warren. So they remained perfectly still in the western trench ; and ere long the Dutch gunners, seeing no sign of movement, came to the conclusion that every man in the redoubt had been killed. Wherefore they ceased their shelling ; and Driscoll's men, with one or two unlucky exceptions, escaped with their lives. Twenty minutes more, and in all human probability not a man would have lived to tell the tale.

The defenders began to be faced, in the second week of the leaguer, by a serious difficulty. Ammunition for the big guns began to run short—not to the point of famine, exactly ; but to the point at which Lukin could not allow his gunners to fire except upon necessity. Naturally, this gave a considerable advantage to the besiegers ; for while they could fire at their pleasure the British guns could not afford to reply unless they were quite sure of the position and range of the piece at which they aimed. After the 19th the Hotchkiss was silent altogether—its last few rounds were being reserved for emergencies. And the rest of the guns were chipped and defaced all over by the perpetual battering of the enemy's shells. There was, however, the consolation that although the shells of the Dutch gunners had killed and injured much live and dead stock, they had hardly injured one man, and had not put a single British piece out of action. On the other hand, Lukin's guns had silenced piece after piece of theirs, and had even damaged one 9-pounder Krupp so badly as to put it out of action for the rest of the siege.

The first week of the siege, from Monday, the 9th of April, to Monday, the 16th, had been a hot week. Not even Baden-Powell could have wished for a hotter corner than the heights of Wepener that second week in April. The total casualties had been 134, of whom 19 were killed or died of wounds. The wounded only include those who were in hospital for a longer or shorter time ; not those who merely had a little skin-barking or a crack on the head from a stone dislodged from a sangar, or such-like.

The very day on which the Boer Creusot was smashing Driscoll's redoubt to smithereens, Captain Lukin's gunners had an opportunity afforded them of showing the real powers of the shrapnel shell.

Brabant and Hart had set out from Aliwal North on the 14th, and by this time (16th) were marching out of Rouxville on the way to Dalgety's assistance. The Boers of Rouxville and thereabouts, such of them as had been left behind on their farms, promptly warned De Wet and Olivier of

the movement, and on Monday, the 16th, De Wet resolved to go and meet the relief column. He accordingly removed the guns from the top of Jammers Berg to accompany the commando about to set out south ; which commando consisted of the men who had for the past several days been posted on the slopes of the great mountain. Late in the afternoon the British gunners caught sight of masses of brown horsemen moving off towards Wepener. In a very few minutes every possible gun was trained on the massed bodies, and there flew across the veldt shell after shell. One of the Naval 12-lb. quick-firers planted ten shells amongst the burghers ere they could scatter for safety, and great was the execution. The horsemen promptly broke up their dense formation and galloped outwards, thus offering but a slender target to the British gunners. A target they did not attempt to hit ; for they had taken their toll and were satisfied.

In all, during the eight days, the Boers had lost in killed about 120 men, and in wounded nearly five times that number. Their losses had been so much heavier than the British for precisely the same reason that hitherto the British had almost invariably suffered more than they. It is inevitable in these days that a force attacking a fortified position should lose heavily. Even before the magazine made the rifle twice the weapon it had been before for defensive purposes, the Prussians lost at Gravelotte an enormous number of men in attacking a hill held by a small number of French troops. What is more, after losing in the assault twice as many soldiers as there were Frenchmen on the hill, the Prussians did not storm the position. At Wepener, had it not been for the incomplete state of the fortifications when the siege began, there was no reason why the British casualties should have been half so great as they were.

To return to the fighting. The night of Monday, and the early hours of Tuesday (16th–17th) were spent in mending the smashed redoubt. Maxwell and his twenty sappers, aided by numbers of Basutos, laboured all night, and by daybreak had made the position tenable once more. Tuesday saw the Dutchmen on the south and south-west at their tactics of the previous day. They hammered the schanzes fiercely with common shell at short range, while a whole army of marksmen watched for any movement in the exposed trenches. At night, the sappers and the natives again repaired damages.

And so the siege continued. Fierce cannonade and deadlier sniping. And the rain fell in torrents. Well might the Colonial Division look pale and wan. Two to four hours' sleep out of the twenty-four, scanty rations, perpetual drenchings and mud, the necessity of lying quite still for hours together on, or rather in, slush a foot thick. Add to all this the knowledge that if by any chance the Boers should carry the position, the lot of the garrison would be terrible—because the enemy never showed mercy to a Colonial—and can you wonder that white hairs showed on the heads of many of the garrison : that many a man whose beard had been brown on the 9th of April found it grey on the 19th ? Such was the case.

But the knowledge that capture meant for them not the treatment accorded to prisoners of war, but the punishment meted out to felons, only made the Colonial Division more grim and more determined. They swore by all that was holy and unholy never to surrender. They did not conceal from themselves the fact that their position

was precarious ; that unless relief soon came they might be beaten. But with an oath and a vow great and strong, they bound themselves to die fighting.

On the thirteenth day of the siege (21st April) the Dutchmen started an attack at a new point. They placed five guns on a kopje 2,000 yards from the hill held by the Kaffrarian Rifles ; and for six mortal hours battered away at the fortifications there. Not without success, for they hammered the schanzes to pieces, destroyed a gun emplacement, and rendered the rifle-pits untenable. Fortunately the Kaffrarians had improved their defences greatly since the siege started, by constructing traverses and crescent-shaped trenches, else the hundreds of shells that were pumped into them in the course of the day must have destroyed them utterly. As it was, their losses were but slight.

Rundle was now with his men at Dewetsdorp, and Brabant and Hart were in touch with the enemy at Bushman's Kop * ; and the Boers seemed to have made up their minds that if Dalgety's men were to be captured, they must be captured now or never. The 22nd fell on a Sunday, and all day firing was kept up. The previous Sunday had been a rest-day—employed by the Boers in religious observances. Monday (23rd) was a day of great anxiety. Firing could be heard on south and west, where Brabant and Rundle respectively were engaged with the enemy.

The Boers, threatened now by the western and southern relief columns, decided to make one more attempt to overwhelm their hated foes, the Colonials. They had been compelled to detach many men to Bushman's Kop * and Dewetsdorp † ; but they still far out-numbered the garrison, and they threw themselves into one last desperate and determined assault. This assault was to be delivered on the two parts of the British lines where the shelling had recently been so severe ; and the Boers counted on finding the fortifications so damaged by the heavy cannonade as to afford little protection to the defenders. They reckoned without the sappers. For although doubtless the schanzes and sangars were damaged considerably, Maxwell and his men had invariably repaired by night most of the destruction done by day.

In the early hours of Monday morning (23rd), at about 1 a.m., reinforcements arrived in the British camp in the person of Lieutenant Smallwood, of the 1st Brabant's Horse. This intelligent and hardy officer had volunteered to ride through from Brabant's column ; and, accompanied by Mr. Hughes, a press correspondent, he struck round through Basutoland, *viâ* Mafeteng, and reached the Basuto border overlooking Wepener on the night of the 22nd. As soon at it was dark the adventurous companions started out to steal through the Boer lines, making for Jammers Berg bridge. Time after time they had to imitate the hunted partridge and lie for half an hour hidden in a cleft in the ground, what time scores of Boers passed within arm's length. They dodged picket after picket, sentry after sentry, until they came to the head of the bridge. Then a sentry shouted "*Wie gaat da?*"

* The operations for the relief of Wepener are fully described in the following chapters. Here they are only referred to so far as they bear on the siege itself.

**Bushman's Kop* is a common name in South Africa. One must be careful to distinguish between the hill of that name between Sanna's Post and Bloemfontein and the other Bushman's Kop between Rouxville and Wepener.

† *Dorp* = village. Dewetsdorp = De Wet's Dorp.

Smallwood faded into the rough ground—pulling Hughes after him, and together they slipped into a donga by the riverside. Along this they stole until they were at the back of the picket, and when the watchful sentry was not looking their way they wriggled a yard or two on their bellies. It took them three hours to gain 100 yards, but at last they reached the bridge head, crept over on their hands and knees, and were amongst friends and comrades again.

They brought the news that in a day or two, at most, the valiant Brabant and the fire-eating chief of the Irish Brigade would be at the gates of Wepener.

The garrison could do with a little encouragement. At 6 a.m. there burst over the trenches to the north a howling, shrieking, whistling tempest of shot and shell, and 500 Transvaalers, bent on victory, advanced to the attack. They crawled and crept and glided from cover to cover, firing as they came on with incredible rapidity. From a kopje on the flank three great guns covered the advance. And so fierce was the attack, so vicious the firing, that it seemed almost impossible for mortal men to withstand it.

But the Colonial Division was made of stern stuff. Coolly they crouched behind their battered sangars: calmly they lay in their slushy trenches. Let but a Boer show enough to be seen, and the visible part of him was marked down by the steady rifles of the Kaffrarians. And Lukin's gunners worked until the sweat made channels down their grimy faces.

Brave men and hardy were the Transvaalers. Steadfastly they swarmed up the hillside. Nor could their attack have failed had the Colonials been one whit less determined than they were. Relief was in sight, for Brabant, with the morning sun, flashed messages from Bushman's Kop. They had kept the flag flying for two weary, bloody weeks. Should they haul it down now? No! By the bones of the Empire's foundation; by the memory of their fathers; by the splendour of the British name: No!

"They come. They come. Steady, the Kaffrarian Rifles. Steady, Brabant's Horse. Magazine volleys. Ready! Present! Fire! Now keep at it. Make that slope one lively, leaden hell whereon no man can stay and live." They halt. They waver. A cheer and another volley. And with that calm fury that marks the Anglo-Saxon when he fights, the troopers load and with deliberate aim send down the hill a whistling storm of death.

The assault is stayed for a while; though the flying burghers soon cease to run, and, crouching behind the boulders lower down the incline, fire steadily and well at the stone parapets. Chips of stone fly. A man draws his hand across his face. Blood. "Better go to the rear, old man." "Rear be darned," he says; and, being an American, he says it with emphasis, "No tarnation rear for me till I've killed somebody." And he settles down to work, ever and anon stopping to wipe the blood out of his eyes.

Twice more the burghers rush up the slope. Twice more the deliberate volleys of the Colonials drive them back; and at 10.30 a.m. the attack on the northern defence is practically over. The Transvaalers are beaten, and they know it. And, unless he is much mistaken, the rifle of the American has accounted for two of the bodies which an ambulance now removes.

At 11 a.m. the commandoes on the south made one more attack to wrest the ridge of kopjes and the south-western redoubt

from the war-worn Cape Rifles and Scots and Driscoll's Scouts. Under cover of a heavy shell-fire they clambered up the ridge, only to be met by a fusillade as determined as, and better aimed than, their own.

and bravest of the Cape men had volunteered to hold it as fast as it was emptied by shell and bullet. The numbers of the enemy were not so formidable now as they had been; yet they were sufficiently superior to be able to bring to bear on

"SCORES OF BOERS PASSED WITHIN ARM'S LENGTH" (*p.* 911).

Once more blood ran in the trenches of the Cape Mounted Rifles. In particular, it flowed freely in one of the advance trenches, grimly named "the slaughter-house." There had fallen Major Sprenger and Captain Goldsworthy, and many another gallant fellow; for this trench was more exposed than any other, and the best

the position four rifles to every one on the defenders' side.

At last, by superhuman efforts, some 200 burghers pressed up to within 100 yards of "the slaughterhouse," after having picked off most of the men in that trench. They crept up a few yards more; then, rising, poured in a volley and rushed at the

schanze. But behind the "slaughterhouse" were the Royal Scots—and a mud-stained, blood-stained, unwashed, unkempt set of ruffians they looked. They saw the Boers rushing, and their warrior hearts beat quick with joy. Softly, like a man in a dream, their captain gave the word. "Fix bayonets." It was done in a trice. "Ready!" The men loaded their rifles. "A volley, my lads, and then the steel. All together——" the whistle blows. A flame flies along the parapet. Then over the stone wall spring the Royal Scots.

Once they shouted: once only. Then the slaying began. Grimly they thrust in the steel, shearing through all that stood before them; through bone and sinew, through heart and lungs, through limb and trunk. So fierce, so vengeful were the strokes that the red point always came out at the other side. The burghers were brave enough: let no man deny it. But they were as sheep when the little handful of Scots leaped on them like a troop of lions on a defenceless flock. They must either run or die. So they ran—ran, leaving mangled bodies of friends and kinsfolk and comrades dyeing the kopje with their blood.

Again the garrison had triumphed. And from the heights across the Caledon, where the Basuto country was, burst shouts and songs of triumph, yells and taunts of derision. Fifty thousand throats swelled the chorus.

Ever since the siege began the black warriors had been gathered in their thousands on these heights, watching with fascinated interest the struggle of the white men. Like the spectators at a mediæval tournament, they had applauded the gallant deeds of the combatants, and as they saw the British holding out day after day, night after night, against the assault of enormous odds, they came to have a profound trust and confidence in the "big heart" of the Queen's soldiers. When, therefore, they saw the Royal Scots launch themselves like the levin-bolt at five times their number, they held their breath for a time, wondering what the end might be. But when they saw the bloody bayonets of the 1st Foot scatter and utterly destroy the hated Dutchmen, they opened their throats and yelled their applause across the river.

The garrison had triumphed—finally triumphed. That very afternoon large parties of the enemy trekked south, to take part in the resistance to Brabant and Hart. Others flocked westward to reinforce the commandoes at Dewetsdorp and Thaba N'chu. The remainder of the investing force was evidently left to "contain" Dalgety's garrison, so as to have them bottled up if Rundle and Brabant should be beaten. The anxieties of the garrison were at an end now, for they were in constant communication with the southern relief column.

They had one anxiety, however. They were mightily afraid that the Dutchmen would slip away before Brabant got to Wepener. The "containing" force had enormous quantities of stores and ammunition, and Dalgety's men felt confident that if Brabant would dash on from Bushman's Kop, he, with the assistance of the garrison, would make a haul more than sufficient to counterbalance the convoy lost at Koorn Spruit. Dalgety equipped 300 men—those in the best condition—and mounted them on the best of the horses, ready to dash across the Boer retreat as soon as Brabant's column should appear.

But the relief force did not appear until it was too late. Brabant and Hart saw no cause to hurry; they saw many reasons why they should advance without haste.

Besides, the relief force had been working hard, and was tired. And when the sun rose on the morning of the 25th, the disgusted garrison saw endless trains of waggons and carts, guarded by brown, bearded horsemen, trekking along towards the north-east along the road to Ladybrand. After the convoy a long procession of mounted men walked their ponies leisurely. The sight was gall and wormwood to the garrison, who had calculated on a pursuit, a little killing, and much spoil.

The siege was ended. For seventeen days Dalgety and his irregulars, having the help of less than 100 regular troops, had kept at bay the largest army the Republics had put into the field, except the original army which Joubert led into Natal in October, 1899.

The casualties numbered 179—about ten per cent. of the actual fighting strength of the garrison. An idea may be formed of the way the Cape Mounted Rifles had to fight when it is stated that ninety-seven of the casualties occurred in their ranks. In other words, excluding such "details" as cooks and craftsmen, the Cape Mounted Rifles had more than one in four killed or wounded. The proportion speaks for itself. Driscoll's Scouts also lost heavily, and altogether the defence of the southern and south-western entrenchments accounted for more than two-thirds of the garrison's losses. Most of the damage had been done during the first few days —only forty men being hit in the last ten days of the siege.

The Boers had lost enormously—far worse than they had ever lost before. Proving that no troops, however well they may shoot, can attack steady troops in a fortified position and escape severe punishment.

To the Cape Mounted Rifles; to Dalgety, their colonel and commander of the garrison; to Maxwell, of the Sappers; and to Lukin, who handled the artillery, great credit was due. But where every private fought like Bayard and suffered like a hero, the historian cannot particularise to any great extent.

Thus it came to pass that on the seventeenth day of the siege the baffled Boers departed, and the British troops emerged from their slimy trenches. And the men turned every man to his comrade, and said, "I want a wash. Wonder if there's any soap anywhere." It was seventeen days since any of them had known soap.

AN OUTPOST ENTRENCHED.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

THE RELIEF OF WEPENER.

AFTER the relief of Ladysmith, Lord Roberts sent for some of the troops and several of the officers who had been in Natal, to join him in the Free State. He imported General Hart and his brigade, and also the Fusilier Brigade of General Barton. And, seeing that he was in need of officers of experience and skill, he ordered two of the heroes of Ladysmith, to wit, Ian Hamilton and Archibald Hunter, to come over to Bloemfontein and take commands in the main army. Hunter was a warrior bold, of great experience and wiliness. He combined in his person the best characteristics of his nation. For he was at once bold and canny, a grim fighter and an artful tactician. As for Ian Hamilton, he was perhaps the most skilful of the younger generation. Though only forty, he had seen service in Africa and in Asia, and had, moreover, filled the important post of musketry instructor at Hythe. Here he had laboured, with not a little success, to improve the musketry of the British army—an improvement which seemed to him vital in the light of his experience in the first Boer war.

He was literally a born soldier, having been born in the Gordon Highlanders. And it is safe to say that of all the officers

the form of a raid upon the British communications. If they could reach Bethulie, drive off or capture the forces protecting the railway line there, and blow up the make-shift bridge, over which the Engineers had taken the railway line, they would deal Lord Roberts a blow more serious than any that had been dealt to the British army since the war broke out. For, as we have previously explained, upon this railway line and upon this bridge, over 40,000 men were depending for the daily necessaries of life. They had not had time or opportunity to accumulate supplies in Bloemfontein, and should communication with the south be cut off for a week, the army of occupation must starve. Already Bloemfontein was almost waterless: to deprive it of food would surely complete its destruction.

But here the Boers were foiled. All along the railway line from Bloemfontein to Bethulie, battalion after battalion, squadron after squadron, battery after battery was disposed in grim array. Every yard of the distance was held in strength. For Roberts was too good a general to leave to chance the line upon which the existence of his army depended. He had always been attentive to the commissariat, and indeed owed a great part of his professional success to that attention. Wherefore when De Wet and Olivier made to cut the line of communication they found that to do it they would have to attack a long series of fortified positions strongly held. They declined to take the risk of this, and, turning north-east after being within a few miles' march of Bethulie, joined the force already surrounding Wepener.

Their counterstroke had failed. For, although they had been victorious at Koorn Spruit and at Reddersburg, their victories amounted to nothing from a military point of view. That is to say, no permanent damage was inflicted on the British, and, from a military point of view, were merely isolated incidents and not part of a campaign. This we say without attempting to belittle those successes which, so far as they went, were extremely brilliant.

Having parried the counterstroke, Roberts felt that his turn had come to deliver a counter-counterstroke, and this he purposed to do by hemming in the whole of the Boer force round Wepener. And the way he set to work was as follows:—Brabant was at Aliwal North with the remainder of the Colonial Division, to which Lord Roberts added Hart's brigade, newly arrived from Natal. The 8th Division, under the command of General Rundle, was sent from Bloemfontein by rail to Edenburg, south of Bethanie, in a straight line due west of Wepener. The 3rd Division, which General Gatacre had brought to Bethanie upon his abortive attempt to rescue the Reddersburg column, had now returned to Bethanie after its march to Reddersburg. General Chermside had taken the place of "Old Back-acher" at the head of this division. Rundle also had entrusted to him a force of Yeomanry mounted infantry, some 1,400 in number, under General Brabazon. The Guards' Brigade and the cavalry, under Pole-Carew and French respectively, were at Bloemfontein, and so was Ian Hamilton with his newly-formed mounted infantry division.

The plan of campaign was roughly this:—Brabant should push up from the south with his whole force, turn the Boers out of Rouxville, which they had reoccupied as soon as the garrison had left for Wepener, and hold the Boers to the south.

THE YEOMANRY OUT FOR A CROSS-COUNTRY SCAMPER.

Rundle, Brabazon, and Chermside were to unite at Reddersburg, march on to Dewetsdorp, which would place them upon the north-west of the enemy. Pole-Carew with the 11th Division, and French with two cavalry brigades (3rd and 4th) and Alderson's mounted infantry, were to march out of Bloemfontein east, then turn to the south and march in a south-easterly direction to Dewetsdorp, where they would join hands with the 3rd and 8th Divisions. Ian Hamilton, with his mounted infantry, together with Colvile and the 9th Division, were to set out and strike due east from Bloemfontein to Thaba N'chu.

Then Hamilton and Colvile were to cut across to Ladybrand and advance to the Caledon and sweep down along the Basuto border. They would thus be marching to meet Brabant; he came from the south, while the Boers would be shut in between them. Then Rundle's and Chermside's force would swoop down from the north-west, and so the Boers would find themselves hemmed in by large armies on south, west, and north. It may be said that this would leave the east open to them as an avenue of escape. That is so on the map, but for practical purposes the case was far otherwise. For to retreat to the east meant to cross the border of Basutoland, where stood anxiously expectant a hundred thousand warriors. These warriors would, as we have already related, have been only too delighted to cross the Caledon and lay waste the Free State at the outbreak of the war. Sir Godfrey Langdon, the British Resident, had restrained their ardour, but he had not been able to exact from them a promise not to fight under any provocation. They had obeyed him in so far as to refrain from taking offensive measures, but they had vowed that if any Dutchman set foot upon their soil, they would defend their country to the last. Therefore the Boer leaders would have hesitated a long time before attempting to escape through Basutoland.

Having made clear the general plan and scope of the operations, let us now see how those operations were carried out. Brabant was the first to move. On the 14th of April he set out from Aliwal North on the road to Rouxville, and so well did he march that, on the 15th, he reoccupied that town. Zastron was the next objective, but before leaving Rouxville the fiery little general of the Irish Brigade issued a proclamation. It was as follows:—

"Take notice, inhabitants of Rouxville and all concerned. You are allowed to remain in occupation of your homes in peace and quietness, subject to your proper behaviour always as non-combatants in this war, and your obedience to such rules as the officer I appoint to command here may find necessary to make at such a time. Such rules will not be for oppression but for protection; and I hereby direct him and all troops under his command to treat you with all due respect and kindness. But if, in my absence, you commit, abet, or screen any act of hostility towards the troops of Her Majesty the Queen not consistent with the honourable customs of war with regard to the behaviour of inhabitants considered to be non-combatant, I will, in due time, certainly inflict upon you and this town such penalty as will force you to regret your transgression"

On the 15th, the day on which Rouxville was reoccupied, the 3rd Division and the 8th Division were put in motion. Chermside with the 3rd marched from Bethanie to Reddersburg, and Rundle with the 8th from Edenburg to the same place. Rundle, as senior general, was in chief command of the forces now marching on Dewetsdorp. He had with him in all eight batteries of infantry, 24 guns, and nearly 2,000 mounted men, the last-named being under General

Brabazon, a dashing cavalryman who had seen considerable service in Afghanistan and Egypt. It should be said that of the mounted troops 700 were Imperial Yeomanry, and De Montmorency's Scouts—now, alas, without their fiery young leader—also accompanied Brabazon. Angus MacNeill had succeeded to the command of the scouts. General Campbell, with another infantry brigade, had been left behind at Edenburg ; but he was relieved by other troops and promptly set out along the road to catch up with Rundle.

On the 19th of April the column was at Oorloogs Poort, only twelve miles from Dewetsdorp, when scouts came in with warnings of the enemy's proximity. Rundle flashed back messages to headquarters, saying that he believed that he had found the enemy, and, further, that he wanted all the troops who could be spared, seeing that the country was exceedingly difficult. Lord Roberts immediately despatched the Grenadier Guards, ordering them to make their best speed to come up with Rundle before it was all over. Thus you have Rundle's and Chermside's divisions twelve miles from Dewetsdorp, with a brigade of infantry twenty miles in rear on the Reddersburg road, and a battalion hurrying across from Bloemfontein by forced marches.

The next day (20th) Rundle came in touch with the enemy. General Brabazon with his mounted troops was well ahead of the main column. He was up early from his bivouac, and with patrols spread out like a cloud in front and on both flanks, he moved forward towards a plateau in his immediate front. This plateau was of enormous extent, and out of it rose many kopjes, some in clumps and some in ridges. At about 8 a.m. a few dropping shots were heard, and back galloped a patrol of the Yeomanry with news that they had come upon a Boer picket. It was not Brabazon's business to fight the Boer army, if this was the Boer army in front of him. It was his business to drive in the enemy's picket, to reconnoitre the ground, and to find out the main position of the foeman. Thus when the main column and its commander-in-chief should come up, they would find the work before them fairly straightforward. For they would know where the enemy was, what his strength was, how many guns he had, what sort of ground lay between him and them ; and, in fact, would at once be in possession of all the preliminary information necessary for them to have.

A plateau ahead certainly looked like a place where a defensive force might take up its position. Brabazon determined to find out. "Yeomanry to the right." A few hurried orders, and 700 of the most magnificent troops ever seen on the battlefield galloped round to the right of the road, making for the rear of the first clump of kopjes on the plateau.

The new troops had adapted themselves easily to the new requirements of warfare. To begin with, they had not so much to unlearn as had the regulars. They had not the tendency to get into formations only suitable for the shock tactics of a past generation. They spread out in the formation much resembling that of a pack of hounds, with plenty of distance, not less than three horses' lengths, between the files. And riding more like men riding to hounds than like a regiment of cavalry, they galloped at full speed to reach the rear of the first Boer position. From that position rifles spoke occasionally, and it would have gone ill with the Imperial Yeomanry if they had been in close formation. As it was they kept spread out, nor

advanced too close to the Boer rifles. They did not intend to come any closer to the cluster of kopjes until they had reached the rear of them. Colonel Sitwell, who commanded the Imperial Yeomanry, led them with great judgment, just keeping out of serious danger, while not making too wide a circuit. In three-quarters of an hour the cluster of kopjes was no longer in front of the yeomen. In another ten minutes they had passed it on their left, and Sitwell just gave the order to left wheel, when the Boers, who were only a strong picket, recognised the fact that their position was turned, hurried to the wiry ponies standing tethered in rear, and rode hastily away.

So much ground had been gained, and Brabazon advanced and occupied it, making it the starting-point of a fresh advance. For not far away along the plateau was a ridge of rocky kopjes, whence rifles spoke, as the Boer sharpshooters tried their luck at 2,500 yards. Again Sitwell and his yeomen streamed out on the flank, while the scouts and a few others languidly replied to the sniping from the front. Again the Dutchmen waited until the yeomen appeared well on the flank, and again they bolted to another set of kopjes in the rear. Four times the Yeomanry galloped out, and four times the Boers left their kopjes and retired, until Brabazon found himself in possession of the whole of the plateau. Clearly there must be some position ahead of this, where the main Boer army intended to make a stand. Looking west from the plateau, Brabazon could see a steep rocky kopje, standing out dark and forbidding in isolated grandeur from the veldt, and beyond this hill, about a mile, was a steep, smooth, grass-covered hill, a total contrast to the frowning kopje.

Now, the rocky kopje commanded the plateau which General Brabazon had just captured; and that commander saw instantly that unless he captured the kopje he might as well give up the plateau. He had no idea in what strength the kopje was held. He thought it extremely unlikely that there would be much heavy artillery on it, and he thought that if he pressed an attack on the position without giving the Boers time to get their breath after being chased from the plateau, he might hustle them out.

Angus MacNeill was entrusted with the frontal attack, while once more the Yeomanry galloped off to the right as though to surround the isolated hill. MacNeill led his men forward after the style they had been taught by De Montmorency; that is, in single file with about about fifty yards between one horse and the next. At full gallop the scouts streamed out from the plateau, and, despite a considerable fusillade from behind the boulders of the kopje, they reached the foot of the position in safety. When the first man arrived he dismounted, hid his horse, and stretched out behind a stone and unslung his rifle. All of which was done in about thirty seconds. When the next man came up he planted himself similarly, from twenty to fifty yards on the left of the first. And so on, until there stretched across the front of the Boer position a line of keen-eyed sharpshooters, who, as soon as the last man arrived, began to glide from rock to rock, from bush to bush, from mound to mound, with inconceivable rapidity. The Dutchmen kept up the firing, though it was precious little they had to aim at, and the scouts on their part kept up a running fire on the parapets of the Boer entrenchments. The contest was sufficiently humane; for although both parties could shoot more than little, yet

they each possessed the art of taking cover so thoroughly well that not a soul was touched on either side.

But the scouts were getting on. Already their line stretched across the middle of the kopje, and it seemed as if they would before long come to point-blank fighting; when suddenly there came from the top a fusillade far different from the careful musketry hitherto experienced by the scouts. It seemed as though every Boer was firing as fast as he could, with intent to empty his magazine. In point of fact that is exactly what it was.

Colonel Sitwell and his Yeomanry had appeared in full cry on their flank, galloping as hard as their horses could tear to the rear of the kopje. The Boers suddenly lost their nerve, and, emptying their magazines furiously on the scouts in front, slung their rifles and ran for dear life down the other side of the kopje, where they mounted their ponies and galloped as though panic-stricken towards the green hill before referred to. The scouts promptly ran up the kopje and took possession of it, and Brabazon sent to reinforce them about 200 more men, who were instructed to throw up loose sangars as quickly as possible. For the cavalry general was considerably ahead of the main body. He had no guns, and he thought it highly probable that the Boers would make an attempt to regain such a strong position as the rocky hill before the main column could come up.

He was not far wrong. As soon as the rocky hill was taken, three companies of the Yeomanry galloped off again to perform their sixth turning movement that morning—a manœuvre directed this time against the green hill. But they speedily found that here they had more than a picket to deal with. The green hill was, in fact, the Boer main position. It was strongly and carefully entrenched and defended by artillery and a large body of rifles. The flanking party retired almost immediately they came within rifle shot; for they found themselves met by a tremendous rifle fire as well as shrapnel from a field gun. For the first time during the day the yeomen sustained injury. The Boers turned heavy guns on to the rocky kopje, and shelled it with great accuracy and considerable spirit. More than one man was hit, and the yeomen of the flanking force also sustained damage.

Brabazon now came to a full stop. He had done his part of the business. He had cleared the front of all advanced parties of the enemy. He had even done more than his share in that line by capturing the rocky kopje which the enemy had intended to hold permanently to protect their front. He had located the main position, and when Rundle should arrive there was nothing left to be done except to fight a pitched battle. The preliminary skirmishing had been all accomplished.

Brabazon had sent back word as soon as he seized the rocky kopje, and General Rundle, perceiving the importance of that position and dreading lest the cavalry general should be shelled out of it, ordered the advance guard of his infantry to quicken their paces. He also sent on a field battery. In point of fact there was little cause for alarm, for Brabazon was quite able to hold his own. Indeed, he despatched a galloper to Sir Leslie Rundle entreating that general not to fag his infantry or cause them to get out of breath by undue haste. But at two o'clock in the afternoon the Worcestershire Regiment came striding along the road. The Boers on the green hill saw them coming, and shelled them viciously as they crossed

the open ground in rear of the rocky kopje. But the Worcestershires went coolly ahead, and soon were alongside the cavalry. The field battery also came up, and Brabazon then retired his horsemen, leaving the infantry and artillery to hold the ground he had won. They did so effectively, and at about four o'clock in the afternoon the British gunners, having found the range of the green hill, the Boer guns ceased firing and the battle was over for the day. As the afternoon wore on, the infantry and baggage and convoy of stores slowly lumbered in, ready for battle on the morrow.

TROOPER ROBERTS WINS HIS V.C.

Brabazon's skirmishes on the 20th of April form the opening chapters of a whole volume of fighting. For from that day to the end of the 24th Rundle and his column never ceased to be in touch with the enemy, and as a natural consequence never ceased fighting. Indeed, it could be said that from Friday to Tuesday, both days inclusive, Rundle's column was fighting one and the same battle—the battle of Dewetsdorp. This battle was fought on the whole over sixty or seventy miles of country, amongst the hills and rocks and dongas and every kind of natural feature that could obstruct the operations of troops. The country round Dewetsdorp was, in fact, as suitable as any in the Free State

for the kind of fighting to which the Boer genius had adapted itself.

The Boer losses on the first day of the fighting were comparatively slight, chiefly amongst their gunners. When the 77th Field Battery came up with the Worcestershires in the afternoon they found the range of the Boer guns almost at once, and played upon them with terrible effect. The Dutch gunners here were mostly German mercenaries whom Albrecht had imported, and it is to be said for them that they handled their guns well and stuck to them pluckily, despite the overwhelming shower of shrapnel poured over them by the British gunners. Time and time again the field batteries—for the 74th had come up to help the 77th—burst their shells clean over the Boer gunners, scattering death and wounds. For a moment the Teutonic artillerists would fly to cover, but speedily they would be out again, working their pieces.

There was a big Creusot gun emplaced in a Kaffir kraal down a spruit. This gun had been located by the 77th Battery, and half its gunners slain. Just as darkness set in, the Boers resolved to remove the piece to a fresh position, and by hand labour they pushed it out of the kraal, down the spruit, and to the back of a ridge. Then harnessing six horses to it they lashed the team to fury and galloped as hard as they could go from behind the ridge to a kopje a little further to the right. Between the ridge and kopje they had to cross about 200 yards of open ground, and unfortunately for them the 77th Battery saw them. Immediately every one of the six guns opened fire, and as fast as they could be loaded they hurled shrapnel at the galloping gun.

Bullets whistled round them and the shells burst. The air was brown with puffs of dust raised by the British shells. And not only did the 77th Battery scatter shrapnel round them, but they pitched common shell amongst them. Right valiantly the drivers of the Dutch gun braved the storm. It would have been little discredit to them if they had retired and abandoned the cannon. They did not think of any such course of action. Rising in their saddles they lashed the horses mercilessly, and through the hail of shell galloped their way. It was a magnificent instance of coolness and courage, hardly excelled during the whole campaign.

When night fell the Worcestershires were in occupation of the rocky kopje. The plateau was also occupied by infantry; and the rest of the troops, with Brabazon's infantry, were encamped behind the plateau, sheltered by it from attack. The Boers still held the green hill.

Late that night five-and-twenty of the Worcestershire Regiment, the cooks of the battalion, having prepared an appetising meal for their hungry comrades on the rocky kopje, set out for that position to carry the savoury mess to the men who hungered for it. First of all the cooks tried to clamber up the back of the hill. But they found this too steep, seeing that every man was loaded with as much food as he could carry. They therefore went round the base of the kopje in order to find an easy ascent, with a result that not infrequently happens in a mountainous country. They lost their bearings entirely, and instead of walking up the rocky kopje, they walked slap into the Boer lines on the green hill. Three were shot and twenty-two captured. So the Worcesters went hungry that night, and twenty-two cooks found their way to Pretoria.

The 21st was spent in a reconnaissance in force by Brabazon. The infantry was

not put in motion that day because Rundle resolved to wait until General Campbell joined him with his brigade. The Boers began the early morning with a pom-pom, to which the 74th battery undertook to reply. Field-glasses and telescopes showed that the foemen had made the best of the night, for it was seen that the green hill was now covered with schanzes and trenches. There were four miles of entrenchments, and those in positions quite sufficiently formidable in their natural state. After many tries a common shell struck the shield of the annoying gun and smashed it, after which the troops of General Rundle had peace for a time.

Brabazon was out on the right, making a reconnaissance of the Boer left with about 1,000 men, which included a company of mounted infantry belonging to the Royal Irish Rifles—almost the only men of that battalion not in Pretoria. Brabazon took great care to move well from the rear of the British camp, so that the Boers did not see him start. Then, the enemy being almost due east, he struck due south, and not until he could turn to his front without being seen did he do so.

A rapid gallop and a second left wheel brought the mounted men right on the enemy's left flank. The Brabazon sent forward many patrols to engage the Boer pickets while he sent out more men to his own right (which was to the enemy's rear). It appeared that the left of the Boer position was a farmhouse called the Constantia Farm. The farmhouse was a little towards the left rear of the Boers.

Sitwell was despatched to the right with some of his Yeomanry to outflank the enemy. The Irish Rifles' mounted infantry galloped forward and took possession of an isolated kopje even further out, on the same side. The British patrols soon came into contact with the Boer pickets. And ere long a keen though desultory fire was in progress all along Brabazon's front.

While the flanking movement on his right was in progress, General Brabazon pushed forward his centre as rapidly as possible. The scouts, under the fiery MacNeill, darted to the front and attacked the Boer pickets so fiercely and pressed them so closely as to drive them back on the main body in confusion. Back, and still further back, the scouts drove them, following them up over the rising ground in front of their left flank until at last they drove them over the ridge and themselves occupied it. Brabazon galloped forward with his centre and took possession, to find himself confronted by a tall kopje. Another kopje faced Brabazon's left.

Suddenly there issued from the centre kopje a party of about 200 burghers, who dashed in the spur and galloped hard to the kopje opposite to Brabazon's left. That eminence was, apparently, untenanted, and it immediately struck Angus MacNeill that if he could get there first he would smash up the Boers, who were hurrying to occupy it. The scouts had dismounted; but MacNeill soon had fifty of them in the saddle and was galloping at the head of them straight for the unoccupied hill. With them went Mr. Winston Spencer Churchill, who was always ready for any dare-devil adventure. The scouts had a shorter distance to travel than had the Boers, but at about 120 yards from the top they came across a wire fence, and the time taken in cutting the stout wires was enough to enable the Boers to reach the kopje first.

The Dutchmen threw themselves from their ponies, and opened fire in a moment. It was a dangerous time for the scouts. "Back!" shouted Angus MacNeill, "Gallop."

The scouts, who were mostly dismounted by this time, leapt into the saddles and scurried away from the musketry. All except Churchill. He put his foot into the stirrup to mount, when the saddle swirled round under the horse's belly, and the frightened beast broke loose and galloped away. The young war correspondent, gripping his pistol, took to his heels and ran after his fugitive steed. Bullets spattered round him heavily, when there flashed across from the left a trooper of the name of Roberts. The trooper halted while Churchill jumped up behind him ; but in that moment, a Boer with a sporting rifle took careful aim and hit the horse in the neck. The explosive bullet caused the poor beast fearful agony, but it galloped gallantly on and carried its double burden out of immediate danger. A gallant rescue, not unworthy of the cross "For Valour."

Brabazon's advance into the very heart of the Boer position had disconcerted them somewhat, but they soon recovered, and from the kopje in the centre opened fire with three guns that had been sent hastily to ward off the danger. So Brabazon withdrew with the loss of only half a dozen men, and with the satisfaction of having inflicted ten times that amount of damage on the enemy.

The reconnaissance had been entirely successful. So Leslie Rundle propounded a plan for an attack in force the next day, to take the form of an infantry attack in front and a turning movement by Brabazon on the enemy's left. But that night there came a message, stating that General Pole-Carew was on his way with large reinforcements, and that Rundle was to wait until those reinforcements arrived.

On the very day of Brabazon's successful reconnaissance in force, Brabant came in touch with the enemy at Bushman's Kop. The Colonial general was marching along the road from Rouxville to Wepener with the mounted troops of his relief column, and Hart and his infantry brigade pegging along steadily behind them. At first it seemed as though they would reach Wepener without opposition, and fall upon the investing force on the banks of the Caledon. But the Dutchmen had no idea of being caught, so they sent a body to occupy Bushman's Kop.

The Border Horse marching in front of Brabant's column came within a mile of the kop without sighting an enemy. Scouts rode on in front to clear the ground, and the Border Horse had reached the very foot of the kop before encountering any resistance. The Boers allowed the scouts to approach without revealing themselves, and then, as their manner was, delivered a withering fusillade on the main body. The Border Horse promptly betook themselves to the shelter of a donga at the foot of the hill, whence they kept up a steady fire of musketry until dark. Then they retired, having sustained the loss of four men wounded. Hart and Brabant ultimately consulted together and decided to attack the position on the following morning. It was no more than a day's march from Bushman's Kop to Wepener, and the Colonial general, though not doubting either the will or the ability of Dalgety to hold out for a considerable time longer, felt that for the sake of prestige, if for nothing else, the sooner Wepener was relieved the better.

Already the siege was beginning to have a bad effect. After the capture of Bloemfontein by Lord Roberts, the Free State Boers were so disheartened that they came in by the thousand and submitted. Had Lord Roberts been able to protect these

men on their farms, they would have remained passive. But he was not able to protect them, and, in consequence, they were soon compelled to take up arms again and go on commando. Thousands of others, again, had fled to their remote homes, believing the cause of their country to be hopeless. But they were a determined race. They heard of De Wet's exploits at Koorn Spruit and Reddersburg. Scores of them rode out again. They heard of a whole English army cooped up at Wepener. Hundreds more flocked to the standard of the victorious De Wet, who seemed to them to be a new Cronje—a new scourge to the English, a strong bulwark to the fatherland. They had been assured that God would raise up a man. Here, surely, was the Divine instrument.

It can easily be seen, then, how important it was from the British point of view that the new hope of the Boer people should not be allowed to capture Wepener.

END OF VOLUME I.

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